VALLEY VOICE

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Window Open to File for Office

Staff Reports

Tulare County Registrar of Voters, Rita A. Woodard, announced that Nomination Papers for offices to be voted on at the June 7, 2016 Primary Election were made available beginning on Tuesday, February 16, 2016, and will be available through Friday, March 11, 2016, in the Elections Division, Government Plaza, 5951 South Mooney Blvd. in Visalia.

The offices for which Nomination Papers will be available are as follows:

FEDERAL

- U.S. Representative in Congress 21st District
- U.S. Representative in Congress 22nd District
- U.S. Representative in Congress 23rd District

STATE

- Member of State Assembly 23rd District
- Member of State Assembly 26th District

COUNTY

- County Supervisor 1st District
- County Supervisor 2nd District
- County Supervisor 3rd District

NOTE: Some offices require nomination signatures which are gathered during the nomination period, February 16, 2016 through March 11, 2016. Contact the Elections office for further information.

Office hours are: 7:30am to 5:30pm, Monday through Thursday; 8am to noon on Friday; 8am to 5pm on Friday, March 11, 2016.

For further information regarding filing for an elective office, call (559) 624-7300 or for information on nomination papers that have been filed, check our current Candidate list online at:

http://www.tularecounty.ca.gov/registrarofvoters

Bank of Sierra Agrees to Acquire Porterville Branch

Staff Reports

Bank of the Sierra, the banking subsidiary of Sierra Bancorp, announced that it has entered into an agreement with Citizens Business Bank, the banking subsidiary of CVB Financial Corp., to acquire the deposits and certain loan assets of a branch of Citizens Business Bank located in Porterville, California.

Pending regulatory approval, Sierra's assumption of approximately $22 million in deposits and approximately $1 million in loans is scheduled to be completed in the second quarter of 2016.

Sierra plans to retain the current employees working at the branch.

Tulare County Sheriff Mike Boudreaux announces gang injunctions. Courtesy/Tulare County Sheriff Department

Solutions to Gangs in Earlimart - A Priority for the Tulare County Sheriff's Department

Catherine Doe

Plagued by years of gang activity, Earlimart might finally get some relief. The sheriff's Gang Violence Suppression Unit has started issuing injunctions to identified gang members aimed at the Norteno gang. Even though the sheriff's department has just started educating the community about what the injunction means, the innovative tactic seems to be already be working.

Tulare County Sheriff Mike Boudreaux said during a press conference on February 5 that the sheriff's department has already started serving the injunctions to identified gang members. It has been reported that some of the gang members have just left the area.

"To me that's a win, win," said Boudreaux.

Even though the community of Earlimart has only 8,500 residents, it has been plagued by homicides, vandalism, graffiti and drive-by shootings. Between 2013 and 2015 there were 41 drive-by shootings and 306 burglaries. The amount of gang activity has gotten so intense that residents are afraid to go outside their homes. That affects businesses and children's participation in afterschool educational programs and afterschool sports. The northern gangs outnumber the southern gangs by four to one. The injunction could eventually include the southern gangs.

"I'm here to say that from the sheriff's department, we are dedicating resources to solve the gang problem and make our communities safe," said Boudreaux.

BOUDREAUX continued on **5 »**

Debate Rises Around Mathis' Veterans Benefits & Salary

Catherine Doe

Devon Mathis' election to the California State Assembly in November of 2014 was considered an historic victory. The Veterans' community campaigned hard to get someone elected who would fight for their cause in Sacramento. Disillusioned conservatives were pumped that a young independent resoundly beat the Republican establishment.

Devon Mathis

On election night, Mathis' campaign team celebrated at the Veterans Memorial Building in Visalia and vowed his time in office would be run by locals and not outsiders. Mathis' supporters saw his election as a new age of Republican activism and planned on opening the lines of communications with all constituents, including Democrats.

"We believed in the guy. We believed he was going to change things," said a former staffer.

The excitement turned to disillusionment as Mathis allegedly struggled to win the respect of his peers on the assembly floor, failed to get his bills passed, and either fired or pushed away his original team to be replaced by outsiders. In one year, Assemblyman Mathis lost seven employees, everyone from his chief of staff to the local secretary.

Discontent from his former team started bubbling to the surface months ago. That discontentment culminated in a unified chorus after Mathis announced in January his new Veteran's bill.

The goal of the bill is to give the Department of Veterans Affairs a million dollars a year to help educate veterans on how to get the benefits they deserve. Mathis' former staff said the new bill, though a worthy cause, illustrated the hypocrisy in Mathis' tenure as a Republican assemblyman.

MATHIS continued on **10 »**

HEAT Prevails In Court Again

Catherine Doe

On February 11th, Judge James T. La Porte of the Kings County Superior Court ruled that Hanford Environmental Action Team (HEAT) can proceed with its appeal of the Site Plan Review and the Negative Declaration for the proposed Bajun American Properties, L.P. apartment complex in West Hanford. The city of Hanford stated that HEAT missed the deadline to appeal by one day. The environmental group sued and won.

Robin Mattos, co-founder of HEAT, delivered HEAT's appeal and the $1000 check to Darlene Mata, Community Development Director, ten days after the Notice of Determination for the Negative Declaration for the apartment project was filed by the city with the County Clerk. Mata acknowledged that there was a ten day window to file the appeal but declared that the environmental group was one day late.

Judge La Porte had a different opinion. The February 11th court ruling said "that the Negative Declaration was signed by the Community Development Manager on 6/2/15. Both documents were filed with the county clerk on 6/2/15. Both documents were mailed by certified mail return receipt on 6/2/15."

Mattos delivered the appeal and the fee on 6/12/15, ten days later.

In Judge La Porte's ruling he states "The court finds that on the face of the pleadings, city staff abused its discretion in refusing to accept the appeal filed by petitioner (HEAT) on 6/12/15."

"The city abused it s discretion" is stated three times in the judge's ruling illustrating his frustration with the City of Hanford's actions. In addition to his frustration with the appeal he was dismayed that the city chose to mail the notice of approval of the site plan review and negative declaration to HEAT's lawyer, Richard Harriman.

The ruling says that the "court takes judicial notice of the" MOU legally agreed upon between HEAT and the city. It states, "the parties agreed in a negotiated MOU that if a project was larger than five acres, notice would be given to HEAT and HEAT's counsel by email. The project at issue in the lawsuit exceeds that acreage. ….. since email notice was agreed to by the parties, it was an abuse of discretion not to forward the documents by email, so that petitioners would have the full 10 days in which to prepare the appeal ."

Because the mailed documents did not arrive until 6/6/15, Harriman had a very limited amount of time to prepare and deliver the appeal and the $1000 check.

Bajun American Properties is proposing to build a two-story, 216-unit complex on the corner of Centennial Dr.

HEAT continued on **5 »**

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FROM THE PUBLISHER'S DESK

Dear Max--

I hope this letter finds you well, but given the state of the postal service these days my hope is simply that it finds you at all. Maybe this is why nobody writes letters anymore. So--if this has indeed found you--know that I'm also sending my love to Anne and the Mongol Horde. Pet the dog while you're at it. Have a glass of vino.

Not much new here, sadly--so I might as well just answer your question about how it's going with the paper.

We did a story recently on a veteran who, though on 100% disability, was elected to the state assembly. Apart from his pledge to work across party lines, his platform was strictly that he is a combat veteran. I was told his disabilities were that he can't read, write or remember properly. Sterling qualities in a representative! On top of his salary, the guy gets $3349 a month from the VA: Who says the VA isn't doing enough for its patients?

Nobody whom I've talked to down here can believe it. It's almost unanimously seen as fraud, akin to falsely claiming whiplash after a car accident or--while on disability--getting caught playing volleyball or something. I saw the dentist last week and, not having anything to say for myself, told him about it. My own opinion is that the representative should decline--or donate--his benefits while drawing a salary. That, I told him, would be greatness.

"Greatness and money," the dentist said, "don't often intersect." Then he said I could probably keep my teeth for the next six months, at least: so--hooray!

Less celebratory have been some of the letters to yours truly. It's as though this representative--or maybe his chief of staff--put out the word to slime us online. So about a dozen vets (of course)and, so far as I can tell, even an aunt of the representative has written the editor.

But--Christ on a bike!--isn't putting the information out there what a newspaper is supposed to do?

Get this: This disability he collects is not like in the real world, where--once you're no longer disabled--your disability ends. No. This disability, apparently, goes on for so long as the vet is being treated. And, because medical records are confidential, nobody will ever know if that still holds true. Of course he's "perfectly competent" to hold office. But in the doctor's office? He'll have to be permanently addled to collect his $40k per year; if he's not, the way I understand it, the mere fact that he's getting treatment will suffice. But how are we ever to know if he's even getting treatment?

How are we to know if he's been helped and/or cured or not, or if he is compromised or competent? This strikes me as a pretty sharp practice.

The good news is that his term is only two years. The bad news is he'll likely be re-elected. He'll probably run unopposed.

We're digging on this, Max-o, but anything to do with veterans is the 4th rail of American politics, and I don't yet know how we'll ever get to the bottom of it. What I do know is that nobody would give a damn if, instead of being a vet, this guy drove a truck or something. Come to think of it, that's exactly what he did in the National Guard.

So, yes--he was deployed overseas--but not in the infantry. Still.

Speaking of driving a truck, what this guy did on being elected was to run out and buy himself a $75,000 pick-up truck. His salary from the state assembly is $109,000. I figure, after all the usual deductions, that his annual cut of this is actually closer to $68,000 or so. I wonder if he drives this gas guzzler back and forth from Sacramento.

Fiscal responsibility!

Hell, Max--you can see why he's sucking that disability boob. He has to grab as much as he can in his two years--in the off chance he's not re-elected--just to make his truck payment alone. And it's our money. It's all our money. His salary, the VA benefits...What a fine spirit of service! The only thing we can't confirm absolutely is whether or not he's also raking money in from Wounded Warrior--but at least that's not taxpayer money. No. Those are honest donations from good people who think this whole shooting match is on the level.

Max, I can see you sitting there with your wine--and you know we have nothing against veterans. My uncle was a vet. It's just that I don't quite feel this guy's constituents are being squarely accommodated. Something seems up!

And it seems that more than just this might be up. Nothing illegal here so far--but the smell test? No siree. Like I said, we'll keep digging.

That's what newspapers do--investigate and point things out. I don't suppose I have to point out to you that now you owe me a letter...Or do I?

Cheers

— Joseph Oldenbourg

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Political Fix

Catherine Doe

Turning The Clock Back

The South Carolina presidential debate on February 13 made it abundantly clear that the only potty trained Republican on the dais was Ohio Governor John Kasich. I would have included Dr. Ben Carson on the list, but after he said the Pyramids of Giza were actually grain silos, I haven't paid much attention to him.

Gov. Kasich, who stays on point and keeps his message positive, said that the Republican sandbox brawl practically handed the presidency over to Hilary Clinton. (Notice Republicans always assume Mr. Sanders is going to lose.) Gov. Kasich had just taken a surprising second in the New Hampshire Primary, and said during his "victory" speech, "there is magic in the air with this campaign."

Magic is exactly what Gov. Kasich is going to need to catch up to Mr. Trump as he continues to dominate this election. Mr. Trump did a lot yelling but was spot on during the debate. He said, among other things, that it was a mistake to invade Iraq, that President George W. Bush did not keep us safe during his presidency, and maybe Barbara Bush should be running for president instead of Jeb.

Mr. Trump's "hitting back" and Gov. Kasich's maturity seem to be a winning strategy. But another popular tactic by all the candidates is to pummel President Obama's performance during his last seven years in office. Every debate is filled with doom and gloom about how United States is about to fall off the side of the Earth. The sound bites are, "We need to restore America," "rebuild the military" and Trump's campaign slogan, "Make America Great Again."

Mr. Trump's slogan is a deliberate flashback to Ronald Reagan's 1979 slogan, "Let's Make America Great Again." Not only does the campaign slogan try to put Mr. Trump on a level playing field as the Republican icon, it harks back to the days, in 1979, when United States citizens suffered through long lines at the gas station, high unemployment and inflation, all of which could be attributable to President Carter's presidency.

Here is the problem. It could be argued that things were worse after four years of President Carter. But it cannot be said that the United States is in worse condition since President Obama took office. When President Obama took office the country was bogged down in an unpopular, expensive war and the economy had just entered the Great Recession after eight years of Bush's laissez-faire economics.

Since President Obama took office the unemployment rate has gone down from 10% to 5%. The economy has added nearly 8.4 million jobs. The deficit has been cut by a third since 2013. The stock market has risen by 50% and corporate profits are up 166%. Real weekly wages are up 3.4%. Gas prices are down, from $4.11 per gallon in 2008 to $2.40 in 2015. U.S. economic growth, measured by the GDP, went up from -0.3% in 2008 to 3.7%. Iran's nuclear centrifuges, once 19,000, are soon to be under 6,000.

So what do the Republican's really mean by "bring America back again?" because I'm assuming they don't want 10% employment and a negative GDP. Maybe they are referring to the fact that they would like to turn the clock back on Gays openly serving in the military? Maybe they would like to go back to the days when marijuana was considered taboo? Maybe they just want to go back to a time when Marriage Equality meant that dad changed a few diapers on the week end?

Maybe when they cry that President Obama's tenure has been a complete disaster, what they mean to say is that they can't turn back to clock on social reforms.

Where was Bernie Sanders When I Wanted a Longer Recess?

My family's lawyer has a yearly Consultants' Dinner at the Vintage Press where he gathers a variety of writers, politicians, environmentalists and agitators to share their thoughts on how we can make a better tomorrow. I thought I would take the opportunity to survey our diverse group on how they would vote in the presidential primary. Not all attendees were Democrats but even so, I limited the choice to Sen. Bernie Sanders or Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

Out of the 16 dinner guests, and our waitress, the votes were two undecided, five for Ms. Clinton, and ten for Mr. Sanders. Our little dinner party reflected the mood of the country – Americans are voting for a grumpy old socialist Jew.

Talking about Jewish, Mr. Sanders became the first Jew to ever win a primary in the United States. The "making history" moniker has always been Ms. Clinton's for possibly being the first woman president, but Mr. Sanders has become quite a history maker himself. And he didn't just win the New Hampshire primary, he crushed it, beating Ms. Clinton 60% to 38%.

So how did a socialist beat a member of the Democratic establishment? By doing what socialist do – give stuff away.

There he stood in front of a crowd of millennials saying after his victory in New Hampshire, "Who is ready for a political revolution?" Of course the crowd erupted in wild cheers. By political revolution he means, besides campaign finance reform and breaking up Wall Street, giving stuff away: such as college tuition, healthcare, forgiving student debt, providing for mandatory paid family and medical leave, and raising the minimum wage to $15 an hour.

POLITICAL FIX continued on **4 »**

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Political Fix

Continued from p. 3

Like a school girl I was cheering in front of the TV too. Mr. Sanders campaign reminds me when I was in sixth grade and every Friday afternoon the Cafeteria ladies would run out of big sticks ice cream pops. A boy ran for president of our school who promised more big sticks, so I voted for him.

So why am I not voting for Bernie Sanders? Let's start with the free college.

Mr. Sanders has given few details about how he would pay for college. Many European countries like Germany provide free college, but there is a catch. Those European countries that offer free college have a much lower enrollment than in America. In the United States you don't even have to graduate from high school to go to college. Getting accepted to college in countries where it is free entails getting very high test scores and graduating high school. The process is also is exceedingly difficult and selective. Meaning – I would have never made it.

Income tax rate in Germany is 49.3% while the average income tax rate in the United States is 31%. That probably answers how Mr. Sanders plans on paying for his plans, but it's not free if tax payers absorb that cost.

As far as free health care Mr. Sanders has a point. It is really a black eye that the United States is the only developed country without universal health care. Currently under Obamacare it is said that 90% of Americans have health insurance.

That's a croc, and Mr. Sanders knows it and Ms. Clinton pretends she doesn't. He knows that no one with a $6000 deductible is ever going to see a doctor. Also newly insured poor people with Obamacare aren't going to see a doctor because few doctors will accept Obamacare. So Mr. Sanders wants to start from scratch.

What Mr. Sanders needs to scratch is the current American Medical Association (AMA) that limits the number of doctors in this country and keeps the cost of medical universities artificially inflated. If the AMA would clean up their antiquated corrupt practices, the United States would have an abundance of affordable primary physicians who don't have to sell their first-born to pay off their student debt. Then we can talk about Universal Health Care.

And that brings us back to free college.

And Finally…

I don't know how much cross pollination happens between Political Fix and the series of cat articles I wrote concerning Mooney Grove. But, for those who read both, my family has a sad anniversary this month. It was February 18 of last year that we lost "Echo the feral kitten."

The Mooney Grove feral cat story developed the week between Christmas and New Year's 2014. It was a slow news week so the editor said "go for it" when I wanted to write about our family cat.

My husband found Echo when she was no bigger than the palm of his hand. She was stuck in a bush where he and our son were gardening at one of our commercial buildings. My 250 pound, rugby playing son was put in charge of holding onto the kitten on the car ride home. But all five inches of her managed to escape his grasp. "She hissed at me," he whimpered. She spent the next two days hiding in our Toyota Echo until we finally pulled her out from a crawl space under the passenger seat.

Somehow Echo survived our incompetence, beat the odds of being hit by a car, eaten by a coyote, or bitten by a rattler, and made it to adulthood. She mostly lived in the rafters of our carport and gazed down on us with contempt. She hissed at whoever opened the door to let her in to eat then immediately ran back outside. Echo was the worst pet in the history of pets and then one day she developed a skin infection and slipped away to die in peace.

I don't know who was surprised more, Echo or me, but she didn't die. She crawled out of her hiding spot, reduced to a head connected to a pile of bones, and managed to drink some water. Each day, she crawled ten more feet until she dragged herself up the stairs to our front porch. When she finally made it all the way to her food bowl in the kitchen she rarely left. Soon her stomach dragged on the floor and she had three chins. It took six months, but Echo did get back to her lithe, athletic self. She could hunt like a lioness and I looked at her in awe. She looked at me with disdain.

Then one day, completely out of the blue, she ventured beyond the kitchen and sauntered into the family room and began to roll around on the rug. She jumped on my husband's lap, kneaded his belly, and rubbed her face against his. After going through eight of her nine lives, Echo, the feral kitten, became a domesticated cat.

Fast forward nine years later, it was February 18, 2014, that my five kids, husband, and myself packed up the moving truck and reluctantly left our family home for good. Through the grace of God, and realtor extraordinaire Darcy Staberg, we found the perfect home in which to relocate. And by the time the Academy Awards were on a few nights later, my big beautiful family were eating hors d'oeuvres in front of the TV and filling out our ballots just like we always did.

But one member of the family didn't weather the move as well as us humans. Reverting back to her feral instincts, Echo darted out of the car as we pulled into our new driveway and disappeared into the orange grove populated by hungry coyotes.

Ironically, Echo's life was cut short by the actions of a person who is one of Valley Oaks SPCA's largest donors. In fact, I think she is one of two people in their "Golden Circle." When this avid animal lover evicted us, her myopic goal was our house. It never dawned on her the human toll, or the toll it took on our animals, two of which died.

They say that humans and animals return to where they were happiest after they die. Echo's spirit undoubtedly went back to her home in Lemon Cove. She sun bathed on our brick patio and rolled around on our combination Bermuda grass and weeds of our so called front lawn. She dominated her territory hunting mice and gophers like a lioness, even taking down rabbits.

I don't know how thrilled I am about Echo's spending her after-life with my mom, dad and step mom's maid, who promptly moved into our home. In addition to that, the maid built a nondescript fence that blocks the best view on the little knoll where the house sits. It's where Echo and I would enjoy late summer afternoons as we watched the sun set behind the foothills.

But my parents' maid knew me and my kids and she liked us, so she was probably an unwitting participant in the whole unfortunate series of events. I liked and trusted her too so, I hate to say it, but Echo is probably just as happy there in her after-life as she was alive with me. Maybe even more so, now that she doesn't have to wait for us pesky humans to open up the door to her kitchen.

Local Dems Offering National Convention Presentation

The Visalia Democratic Club, a chartered organization of the Tulare County Democratic Party, will hold a National Delegate presentation for those interested in participating as a delegate at the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia this summer. The orientation will be held Monday, Feb 22nd at 7:00 p.m. at 208 W. Main Street, lower level floor conference room in downtown Visalia.

For additional information contact Ruben Macareno at 559-372-2126 or 559-308-9464.

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College of the Sequoias Stops Trap-Neuter-Release Program

Tony Maldonado

College of the Sequoias' Visalia campus will no longer host feral cats. The college had previously been participating in a Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) program in partnership with the Visalia Feral Cat Coalition, (VFCC)but ended the program as of December.

The TNR program outlines a system of trapping feral cats, neutering them and returning them to form stable, non-reproducing cat colonies.

These colonies would guard their territory, according to the information from the VFCC's website, and would prevent other cats from "moving in and stopping the cycle of overpopulation and problem behavior." Cats who have been treated under the program have an ear clipped as a way of identifying them.

In an internal email sent last December, the college's Superintendent/ President Stan Carrizosa thanked the Visalia Feral Cat Coalition and College of the Sequoias Professor Steve Surowiec for their work tending to the colonies and the TNR program. He said that the college was not satisfied with the results, and needed to act due to an increase in the colonies' population.

Even though 79 cats were spayed or neutered in the last five years, Carrizosa said, the colonies continued to grow. In the letter, he said that kittens (estimated to number around 20 as of December) are spotted regularly, and that cats and kittens without a clipped ear are regularly spotted.

While the growing population can be seen as a failure of the TNR program, the population growth may also be due to the Visalia campus's proximity to apartments, homes, restaurants and businesses. Even before the college started participating in the TNR program, feral cats found their way to the Visalia campus for at least 10 years.

"There are a lot of homes and apartments around COS," said Kelly Austin, administrative services and clinic supervisor for the Valley Oak SPCA. "People move out and cats get left behind."

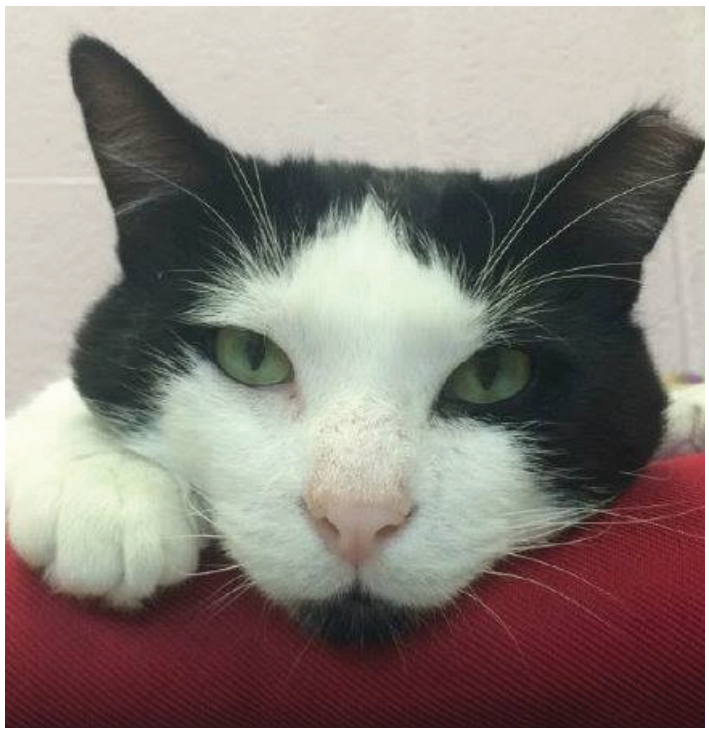
"They (the FCC) have made some very good strides," she said. "We have spayed and neutered many cats from the COS."

In one night at least two years ago, nine or 10 cats were captured at COS for spay and neuter.

Regardless of the cause of the population increase, the college has also had concerns regarding allergies, parasites, urine and fecal matter that the cats may leave behind.

"With the onset of winter we have reports of cats walking into open doors of building/classrooms and infesting interior rooms and corridors with fleas, dander and urine," Carrizosa wrote. "There have been instances of cats getting trapped under buildings, and the students and staff reporting the resulting smells. Litters of kittens have been born under buildings and in crawl-spaces and some have died and if left undetected, could result in odor and eventual airborne spores that could penetrate ducting systems and possibly impact indoor air quality."

"The conditions are such that the health of students and staff are being affected, and
health and safety is our highest priority and responsibility. Starting winter break, we plan to begin removing the cats and deliver them to the SPCA in hopes that they will be adopted. We can no longer allow feeding of cats on the campus," he continued. "Again, we extend our appreciation and sincere regrets to Steve, the Feral Cat Coalition, and to our staff who have taken such great interest in these cats over the past five or more years."



Feral cats that have been trapped, neutered, and returned can be identified by a clipped ear. Courtesy/Modern Cat Magzine

Statistics and quotes from the Feral Cat Coalition show that it is unlikely the cats removed from the college will find homes.

"It is a fact that the removal and killing of outdoor cats is never ending and futile," the coalition writes on its website. "Since feral cats are not adoptable, they have been routinely euthanized."

HEAT

Continued from p. 1

and Millennium Way.

The empty land is zoned as medium density residential. The Community Development Department came to the conclusion that the apartment building would not have an adverse impact on the environment and prepared a negative declaration even though the parcel is surrounded by farmland on three sides.

It is HEAT's position that at least a Focused EIR must be done before the complex is built, especially in light of the fact that it was never resolved by whom, or why, a portion of the neighboring Mussel Slough remnant was filled in. In addition, According to Andy Mattos, a founding member of HEAT, any complex larger than 100 units is required to prepare at least a Focused EIR.

Nevertheless, despite protestations from the community, the Negative Declaration was approved. As a result, according to the *Hanford Sentinel*, "the lawsuit had cost the city nearly $42,000 to fight as of Dec. 30." That amount is likely to increase approximately $10,000 to $25,000 as the result of the City's appearing at the February hearing.

The bottom line is that HEAT just wants the city to follow the law. If the city had recommended to the developer that it prepare a focused EIR as outlined as required by state statute, the project might be almost done.

HEAT's appeal will continue to the Hanford Planning Commission where the Commissioners will decide if it has merit. The Planning Commission can decide to agree with HEAT and order a focused EIR or to keep the negative declaration. HEAT can then take their appeal to the Hanford City Council, which they intend to do if necessary.

Boudreaux

Continued from p. 1

With the help of the Tulare County District Attorney's office, the Sheriff's Gang Violence Suppression Unit conducted a three-year investigation. The investigation used a detailed list of criteria that outlined who would be considered a gang member.The investigation took thousands of personnel hours collecting crime statistics and yielded the names of 189 suspected gang members. Only 89 suspects met the strict criteria to be included in the injunction. More names can be added as new members join a gang.

The next step for the sheriff's department is to continue serving the injunctions, 39 of which have already been done. After all 89 are served there will be a two-week cooling off period. The sheriff's department uses the opportunity to educate gang members they are serving the injunction to about what the injunction means. As mentioned earlier, some gang members have just decided to leave and the hope is others will cease their gang activities altogether.

Because of the success of the gang injunction in the Cutler-Orosi area, the sheriff's department wanted to try it in Earlimart. In Cutler-Orosi from 2005–2010 there were 13 gang-related murders. Because of the injunction, from 2010 to the present there have only been three homicides. Because of the injunction teachers have reported that more students are participating in extra-curricular activities and afterschool sports. Businesses have seen an increase in customers because people feel safer to leave their homes. The TCSD is hoping for the same results in Earlimart.

"Gangs have been instilling fear on our streets and we want people to feel safe again," said Mikki Verissimo, said supervising district attorney.

Sergeant Steve Sanchez helped write the injunction currently in use in Cutler/ Orosi and wrote the injunction for Earlimart. The injunction states that gang members cannot associate within the boundaries of Earlimart. The no-association restriction prohibits gang members from standing, sitting, walking, driving, bicycling, gathering or appearing anywhere in public view with any other defendant herein, or with any other known gang member.

If one of the gang members, who was served with the injunction is caught associating with another gang member they will be arrested and held for 48 hours. The injunction also states that gang members cannot act as lookouts, recruit other gang members, sell drugs, engage in vandalism, and are prohibited from drinking in public. They also have a curfew and cannot be out between 10pm and 5:30am. If caught involved in any of these activities, or out during the curfew, the targeted gang member would be arrested.

The first very limited gang injunction was filed in 1988 to limit graffiti in Los Angeles.The first full-blown injunction similar to the ones used today was filed in October, 1992, in Burbank against the Barrio Elmwood Rifa gang. This was the first injunction to include a no-association clause prohibiting gathering or appearing anywhere in public view with any other defendant anywhere in the target area.

The first time a gang injunction was used in Tulare County was in Visalia. An injunction cannot blanket an entire city so the injunction was specific to North Visalia.

In March, 2008, the Visalia Police Department issued injunctions against more than 250 members of the South Side Kings gang in Ivanhoe. A week later they issued about 470 injunctions in North Visalia, against Mexican Gangster Boys, Encina Street Riders and North Side Birdland Street gangs. All are affiliated with Norteños. A few days later, prosecutors returned to court seeking a similar injunction against members of the Oriental Troops street gang in the same north Visalia area from just south of Lincoln Oval Park to north of "Birdland."

The Ivanhoe and North Visalia injunctions came about because so many Norteño crimes on the north side were going unreported because residents and business operators feared retaliation if they talk to police.

"I have personally investigated crimes … as heinous as murder or carjacking where the families of the victims' refuse to cooperate with me," a Visalia police officer wrote. "The citizens and business owners within the safety zone live in fear and intimidation daily."

Boudreaux said, "No longer can gang members associate with each other in public within the safe zone, which includes the town of Earlimart. If they do so, they will be arrested and prosecuted in court. "

His department was optimistic that the gang injunctions would mean the citizens of Earlimart would be able to get their community back.

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Agriculture

CCM Responds to Introduction of Feinstein Water Bill

California Citrus Mutual

Senator Dianne Feinstein introduced a revised drought relief bill that puts California one step closer to comprehensive water policy reform, according to California Citrus Mutual (CCM) President Joel Nelsen.

"The introduction today of the California Long-Term Provisions for Water Supply and Short-Term Provisions for Emergency Drought Relief Actby Senator Dianne Feinstein identifies several paths by which California can improve its water infrastructure and create a more reliable water system for all water users," said Nelsen. "Everybody wants something. Most want to help people and the environment as well as sustain the production of food and fiber. But, the stakeholders who are singularly focused have been an impediment to improving California's water crisis."

The bill contains language to create short-term solutions for existing problems and focuses on the vibrant future for California's water policy.

More than two years ago CCM made water a priority following a historical zero surface water allocation for Central Valley Water Project water users, namely growers in the Friant service area. Challenges also persist in Southern California which requires attention at the federal level.

"CCM was closely involved with the State Water Bond negotiations and advocated for stronger language and dollars to assist citrus growers in Southern California and Monterey County, for example," Nelsen continued. "It was a natural next step that we seek federal movement toward a balanced water policy."

"Does this bill give us everything we want? Not by a long shot. However, it is a very necessary and positive step toward a policy that both protects the integrity of the Endangered Species Act biological opinions and clarifies where flexibility could exist in the storage and movement of water," said Nelsen.

Nelsen and CCM Board Chairman Kevin Severnsvisited Washington, DC to advocate on behalf of California's $3 billion citrus industry that Congress act now to address California's water crisis.

"A silent disaster is taking place," said Severns. "It's clear Senator Feinstein is willing to work with the House to negotiate a water bill that benefits all California water users."

Nelsen and Severns met with Senator Feinstein along with executives from Wonderful Citrus and Sunkist to discuss the bill.

"It is promising, and Senator Feinstein has every interest in getting something done for California water security once and for all," said Nelsen.

CCM in conjunction with other like-minded entities will now work to help move this package through the Senate, hopefully as part of a Western Water Bill, and then seek House supporters.

"More good ideas could materialize and we're willing to listen to the Senator, but those that seek to impede achievement under the guise of 'helping' must be held accountable for placing California's future in jeopardy," Nelsen concluded.

Farm Bureau Welcomes Water Bill

Introduction of a California water bill in the U.S. Senate by Sen. Dianne Feinstein will help Congress move toward final legislation that addresses the state's chronic water shortages, according to the president of the California Farm Bureau Federation.

"Senator Feinstein has never been shy about tackling the tough issues, and we appreciate her work to create a California water bill for the Senate's consideration," CFBF President Paul Wenger said. "The Senate must pass this bill so it can advance to a conference committee with the drought bill already passed by the House of Representatives.

"Our water system needs to add more flexibility to respond to ever-changing precipitation patterns," Wenger said. "California's water system must be improved to accommodate our people, our environment and our economy.

"We appreciate Senator Feinstein's leadership in introducing the Senate water bill," he said. "It's key to move a bill through the Senate that complements the legislation passed by the House.

"We will analyze the bill carefully and will continue to urge the entire California congressional delegation to work toward common-sense solutions to our state's chronic water crisis," Wenger said.

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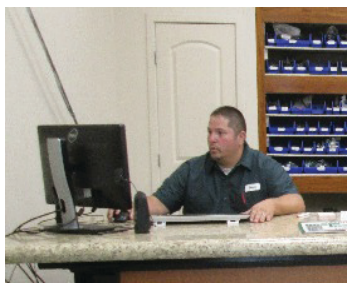

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Agriculture

First Female Veteran Awarded Tractor in Geared to Give Program

Kubota Tractor Corporation today announced its first 2016 recipient of a donated tractor in its "Geared To Give" program. Julie Hollars of Farbotnik Farm in Vallecito in Calaveras County was recognized in a special ceremony today as the first female farmer veteran to receive a donated Kubota L-Series compact tractor through the program, which launched early last year in partnership with the Farmer Veteran Coalition (FVC). The program provides financial support and donated Kubota equipment to U.S. military veterans pursuing a future in farming.

When told by phone that she had been selected as this quarter's Geared to Give recipient, Hollars exclaimed, "Most girls want diamonds and nice cars, all I want is a tractor!" She further explained that the equipment currently in use on the farm is 20 or more years old, so a new tractor will help her family realize their dream of mechanizing some of the work they have been doing by hand for years. The farm currently produces fruit and nut trees including peach, pear, plum, pomegranate, persimmon, cherry, walnut, almond and pecan, along with apples, berries, figs, and Vallecito Wax peppers.

"Through our partnership with FVC, we are investing in the future of farming by making a difference in the lives of farmers who give back to their local communities where our valued customers and dealers live and work," said Tom Sieper, Kubota Tractor Corporation Senior Director and Western Division Manager, who was on hand at today's ceremony. "Julie does her part by working the land to help her family and her local community thrive, and we are thrilled that she is here today to mark the first 2016 donation of a Kubota L-Series tractor, proudly built here in the U.S."

Hollars enlisted in the U.S. Navy in 1988 and served 20 years in various roles, beginning as an Aviation Machinist Mate for SH-60 Helicopters. Her career led her to be among the first women allowed onto an aircraft carrier, where she was deployed to the USS Abraham Lincoln during Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. In 2008, a disability forced Julie to retire from service where she had achieved status as a Chief Petty Officer. She returned to the family farm to raise her daughter and continue the family farming business, and today Julie provides her products to local supermarkets, organic markets, and farmers markets in the summer months.

"As a member of FVC's fellowship program, we have watched Julie's farm grow over the years and today we couldn't be more proud of her efforts," said Michael O'Gorman, executive director of FVC. "Julie is exactly the type of farmer veteran our organization helps to serve – she's a fifth-generation farmer with a passion to grow her family-owned business into a thriving success and just needs a little help to do so. We are honored that Julie is our first female 'Geared to Give' recipient."

Hollars' L-Series will also be equipped with an E60 tiller, made possible by a generous donation from Big Valley Tractor in Stockton, Calif., and their supplier Gearmore. "As Julie's hometown dealer, the team at Big Valley Tractor is humbled to be part of this important tractor delivery because we know that it will help further grow Farbotnik Farms and enable Julie and her family to continue farming successfully," said Brian Lagorio, sales manager at Big Valley Tractor.

In addition, a Kubota-orange canopy, which will help shield Hollars from the elements while operating her tractor, was donated by Firebird Products, a Kubota supplier for aftermarket accessories. "We are proud of our veterans," said Keith Robinson, owner of Firebird Products. "We are thankful for a partnership with a company such as Kubota that enables us to support such a worthy cause."

Based in Davis, Calif., FVC is cultivating a new generation of farmers and food leaders, and developing viable employment opportunities and meaningful careers for veterans through the collaboration of the farming and military communities. FVC believes that food production offers purpose and opportunity, as well as physical and psychological benefits for all veterans. FVC works with veterans from all military branches, their families, employers and mentors to support those returning to or beginning careers in food and farming.

Farmer veterans like Hollars can apply to the FVC Fellowship Fund in order to be considered for donated Kubota equipment through the "Geared to Give" program. Kubota has selected its Standard L-Series compact tractors for this program, as their versatility and efficiency are ideal for meeting the varying needs of many small- and medium-sized farming operations. For more information about the "Geared to Give" program, visit www.kubotacares.com. To learn more about FVC, visit www.farmvetco.org.

California Drought Draws Attention in D.C.

Dave Kranz, CFBF

In meeting rooms more than 2,200 miles from the slopes of the Sierra Nevada, the California drought dominated discussions as the California Farm Bureau Federation Board of Directors met with congressional representatives and agency officials in Washington, D.C.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., announced her introduction of California drought legislation as she met with the CFBF board last week, and both she and members of the House of Representatives lamented the loss of water that has been allowed to flow out to sea during this winter's El Niño storms.

Feinstein said her bill includes "short-term operational provisions" to allow more water to be pumped into storage during times of heavy runoff.

Congressional Republicans—who proposed a separate drought-relief bill that passed the House last year—said the Feinstein bill does not go far enough to generate additional water supplies. But they said they hope the Senate will adopt the bill and send it to a House-Senate conference committee that would produce a final bill.

"While Senator Feinstein's bill fails to provide real water to my constituents, I hope she is able to secure passage of the legislation in the Senate so that the two chambers may go to conference and reconcile the differences between both bills," said Rep. David Valadao, R-Hanford, who introduced the House drought-relief bill last year.

Introduction of the Senate bill sets the stage for potential debate on the legislation this year. Feinstein said she would ask the chair and ranking member of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee to hold a mark-up session on the bill and schedule it for debate.

CFBF President Paul Wenger thanked Feinstein for introducing the bill, noting that she "has never been shy about tackling the tough issues," and urged the Senate to pass the bill so it can advance to conference with the House bill.

"It's key to move a bill through the Senate that complements the legislation passed by the House," Wenger said. "We will analyze the bill carefully and will continue to urge the entire California congressional delegation to work toward common-sense solutions to our state's chronic water problems."

Wenger stressed that California's water system "needs to add more flexibility" to respond to changing precipitation patterns, adding that the system must be improved "to accommodate our people, our environment and our economy."

During its annual trip to the nation's capital, the CFBF board met with nearly two-dozen members of Congress, including House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Bakersfield, and House Agriculture Committee Chairman Mike Conaway, R-Texas, plus leaders of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The group also met with Sen. Jerry Moran, R-Kansas, who expressed his concern about the national impact of the California drought and his willingness to help pursue solutions to California agricultural issues.

Although drought and water concerns often rose to the top, the CFBF delegation stressed a number of issues during meetings with congressional representatives. Among them:

The benefits of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a 12-nation agreement before Congress that would open export markets for California agricultural commodities and create jobs in agricultural trade.

During a meeting in his U.S. Capitol office, House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy, left, discusses prospects for federal drought legislation with California Farm Bureau Federation President Paul Wenger and First Vice President Jamie Johansson. Courtesy/ Dave Kranz/California Farm Bureau Federation

A request for improved forest management to reduce wildfire risk, including a change in funding that eliminates the need for federal agencies to shift money away from forest management in order to pay to fight wildfires.

Ongoing opposition to the implementation of new "waters of the United States" regulations by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Army Corps of Engineers. Farm Bureau and other organizations say the regulation—which has been temporarily stayed by a court—would unnecessarily expand EPA authority to regulate normal farming practices and leave farmers and ranchers vulnerable to environmental lawsuits by third parties.

Environmental damage, economic losses and other hardships caused by illegal marijuana grows on both public and private land. CFBF urged Congress to hold a hearing on the impacts of marijuana grows and to set aside funding to help landowners with cleanup costs associated with illegal marijuana cultivation on private property.

The CFBF board also met with new American Farm Bureau Federation President Zippy Duvall, who welcomed the board members to Washington. Duvall, who was elected last month to succeed retired AFBF President Bob Stallman, pledged to focus on issues including trade, technology, immigration reform and efforts to ease the impact of government regulation.

Duvall cited the EPA waters of the U.S. rule as a prime example of regulatory overreach, and said AFBF would continue to pursue efforts to have the rule repealed.

"We'll keep fighting for agriculture, because together we are much stronger than taking on battles alone," he said.

(Dave Kranz is editor of Ag Alert. He may be contacted at dkranz@cfbf.com.)

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Destiny of Visalia Airport Put on Hold for Two Weeks

Nancy Vigran

The US Department of Transportation (DOT) quickly gathered bids from airlines hoping to fill the void of passenger service in and out of Visalia, following the sudden departure of SeaPort Airlines in December.

Visalia City Council and the Airport Advisory Committee received those bids with a deadline of February 25 for community comments to DOT.

"There just was not enough time," said Councilman Bob Link who serves on the committee. "We need more information and time to digest it."

An extension request was filed late last week, said Mario Cifuentes, airport manager, who said he thought DOT will award the extension request until afterthe March 7 city council meeting.

Three air carriers are vying to provide service to Visalia.

Boutique Air, Great Lakes Airlines and Mokulele Airlines have each submitted a bid to the DOT to provide service for Visalia; all three previously bid in 2014, when SeaPort was awarded service.

Any air services would rely on federal subsidies through the Essential Air Services (EAS) program. Airlines receive subsidies from the EAS program to serve smaller markets like Visalia throughout the country.

Kailua-Kona, Hawaii-based Mokulele Airlines bid to provide 48 weekly flights from Visalia to Los Angeles International (LAX) using a nine-passenger Cessna Caravan, the same type of aircraft that SeaPort flew. Mokulele is a new entrant to California; it currently provides service in Hawaii, Pennsylvania and New York.

The carrier stated in its bid that it would have "comfortably configured vans" to drive passengers to a nearby airport in the event of an unrecoverable delay or cancellation, and that it is working on an agreement with the Fresno-Yosemite International Airport to re-route passengers there in the event of heavy fog or inclement weather at Visalia, as a way to avoid cancelling flights.

The airline said it currently has interline agreements–which allow passengers to fly multiple carriers without re-checking their bags–with Alaska Airlines, Air New Zealand and Island Air.

Mokulele's subsidy pricing is tied into whether Imperial/El Centro, another former SeaPort community, also chooses the carrier, and the length of contract it is awarded.

If both communities choose Mokulele and it is provided a four-year contract, its requested subsidy for Visalia service would be $2.1m for its first year of service and $2m for subsequent years.

Cheyenne, Wyoming-based Great Lakes Airlines, Visalia's air carrier prior to SeaPort, also bid for service from Visalia to LAX with two round-trips per day in a 19-passenger pressurized Beechcraft 1900, the same type of aircraft it used to previously service Visalia.

In its bid, the airline touts interline agreements with American Airlines, Delta Airlines and United Airlines, including the ability to earn SkyMiles on Delta. It is requesting a subsidy of $2.6m per year on a two-year contract.

San Francisco-based Boutique Air, which currently provides service to Merced, submitted two separate bids - one for service from Visalia to LAX and Oakland, and another for service from Visalia to LAX and Sacramento, both with two round trips per day.

The airline would provide service in a 9-passenger pressurized Pilatus PC-12, which it says is equipped with power outlets and an enclosed lavatory.

If chosen to provide service to Visalia and Oakland, the airline would require a $3.5m subsidy per year. If it provides service to Sacramento, it would instead request $3.6m per year.

Generally, the committee likes to meet with potential bid-winners prior to making recommendation to council, Cifuentes said. But, no one is standing out at the moment, he added.

"Each has its own unique elements," Cifuentes said.

"Boutique offers two locations, but the bid is $1 million higher," he added.

One of main questions, Cifuentes said, is whether any airline is able to provide cost-effective service and increase ridership. The average subsidy per passenger must remain below $200 or Visalia would be disqualified from the EAS program.

SeaPort had managed to increase ridership significantly. According to the-DOT, Visalia had 9,297 passengers for Fiscal Year 2015, when SeaPort flew from Visalia, compared to 4,355 passengers for Fiscal Year 2014, when Great Lakes provided service.

The other option, for Visalia, is to consider a DOT temporary buyout, the Community Flexibility Pilot Program, in which the city would receive a sizeable grant to upgrade the airport, making it attractive to corporate jets and/or another freight carrier.

For the next 10 years, the airport would not be open for passenger service.

The buyout is based on previous year's subsidies being doubled, Cifuentes said, which would be more than $3 million for Visalia.

Locally, some, including Vice Mayor Warren Gubler, have expressed concern that if passenger service was suspended, it probably would never come back.

The buyout program was first made available in 2004 for up to 10 Essential Air Service cities. As of September 3, 2015, no one had taken that option, according to the Congressional Research Service.

Plans are for the committee to reconvene with receipt of additional information requested and come up with its recommendations to be brought to the full city council at its regular meeting, Tuesday, March 7.

College of the Sequoias' Carrizosa Explores Other Options

Tony Maldonado

College of the Sequoias President Stan Carrizosa is exploring other employment opportunities, he informed College of the Sequoias faculty and staff in late January.

In an internal email, he stated that he had applied for chancellor positions with two community college districts in Southern California, Coast Community College District (CCCD) and North Orange County Community College District (NOCCCD).

Those two colleges, he explained, had their chancellors either resign or retire, and have been searching for replacements since last fall.

Carrizosa said that he was originally contacted last September and had declined to apply for the positions. He was later contacted in December, after the districts decided to extend their search and applied for both. In the letter, he stated that the positions would allow him to be closer to his children.

Carrizosa's son is a singer/songwriter in Los Angeles; in 2008, he won an ABC reality show in which the winner was awarded a Disney record contract and a music video to be shown during the credits of High School Musical 3.

Before coming to the College of the Sequoias, Carrizosa had served as superintendent of the Burbank Unified School District from 2010-2012. Prior to that, he was superintendent of the Visalia Unified School District from 2001-2010.

"I am not in 'search mode,'" he wrote. "If I am not selected (very likely based on competitive national search) I have no other interests to leave College of the Sequoias and the work we are doing together."

On February 10, he followed up the letter with an announcement that while he had withdrawn from consideration for the North Orange position, he had progressed to finalist interviews with Coast Community College District on Thursday, February 18.

"After thoughtful reflection of my experiences in both first round interviews I feel more engaged in the opportunities and possibilities with Coast Community College District (CCCD)," he wrote. "I felt it was my responsibility to focus my interests and show this respect to NOCCCD and therefore withdrew from their process."

"If there is anything I know I am 100% committed to, it is the fact that if I am not the final candidate of choice or a positive agreement cannot be achieved with CCCD," Carrizosa said, "I am so very happy to be here at COS and am excited about our ongoing work and new ideas being generated for our future!"

Hanford, Kings County Sees Some Speed Limit Changes

Nancy Vigran

Drivers may have noticed a change in speed limits on some Hanford streets the past couple of weeks, with an additional number of changes to come on Kings County roads as well.

Following a recent speed study done by the city, approximately 20 streets have seen reductions of mostly 5mph. Where roads have joint jurisdiction with the county, the Board of Supervisors voted unanimously for the part of the roadways in its jurisdiction to follow suit.

"Every five years, the state requires the speed in the city to be reviewed for traffic patterns, etc.," said Lisa Dock, deputy city engineer.

Speed limits are not arbitrary, they follow state regulations and recommendations, Dock explained.

They must follow "the intention of not setting a speed trap," she said.

Generally, speed limits are based upon what speed seems comfortable for drivers to go and keep the flow of traffic in any given area.

Most of the speed reductions are for a 5mph decrease. The Hanford streets have recently seen new signage to indicate new speed limits, although there is nothing to specifically note that it has recently been reduced.

Only streets that display specific speed limits are changed, Dock said. Residential areas that all follow a 25mph speed limit, were not studied and remain the same.

On streets where part of the roadway is under city jurisdiction and part under county jurisdiction, the county is also lowering the speed limit, said Chief Engineer Dominic Tyburski. This involves nine roadways.

"Once they (Hanford) provided the data, the county did concur with their findings," he said.

Some of these roads may go in and out of the city and county, while others may have one direction maintained by the city and the other by the county.

"It's the speed they (drivers) are comfortable with, based on the average speed," Tyburski said.

There is one roadway, Hanford-Armona Road, from 10th Avenue to east of 9 3/4 Avenue that sees a 15mph reduction, from 55 to 40mph.

On 13th Avenue, from Learning Center Drive to Lacey Boulevard and on Lacey Boulevard, from Ninth Avenue to SR43, each sees a 10mph reduction, from 50 to 40mph.

New speed limit signs for the county should be placed by mid-March.

Briefly...

NOMINATIONS BEING ACCEPTED FOR PORTERVILLE'S NEW MILITARY BANNER PROGRAM

The City of Porterville is now accepting nominations for the new Military Banner Program.

It was created for the Porterville area as a way to honor both current and past military personnel for their service to the nation and community.

The banner will act as a public expression of gratitude that pays tribute to the courage, commitment, and heroism displayed by individuals who have served in the United States Armed Forces.

Family members and loved ones may nominate a military hero to be honored with a banner that will show the individual's name and photo.

The banners will be prominently displayed on major streets throughout the City, beginning with Main Street. They will be raised for Memorial Day and lowered after Veterans Day.

To qualify for the Military Banner Program, the honoree must be a current or past member of the United States Armed Forces and a current or past resident within the Porterville area.

Nominations can be submitted online by visiting the City of Porterville's website or by picking up an application at the Parks and Leisure office inside City Hall. Along with the application, the sponsor must also submit an official military photo of the service person. The cost of the banner is $95.00 and shall be the responsibility of the sponsor.

Nominations will be accepted on an on-going basis. The application deadline for the 2016 display period is March 15. Visit the City of Porterville website for more information or call (559) 782-7521.

ZUMBATHON TO BENEFIT WEST HILLS COLLEGE LEMOORE NURSING CLASS PINNING CEREMONY

A Zumbathon will held on Feb. 19 at West Hills College Lemoore to benefit the WHCL nursing program's Class of 2017.

The event is being coordinated by the first year nursing class to fundraise for their pinning ceremony in May 2017 and will be held in the Golden Eagle Arena from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. Zumba is a popular dance fitness program.

"They wanted to host something that encourages healthy behaviors and is fun, since many people make New Year's resolutions to do something healthy," said Cynthia Dolata, Assistant Director of the Associate Degree in Nursing program.

Participants are asked to donate $10 to participate in the Zumbathon.

Tickets are available through WHCL's Health Careers office and can also be purchased from nursing program students.

For more information call (559) 925-3490 or email healthcareerslemoore@whccd.edu.

SIERRA BANCORP DECLARES QUARTERLY CASH DIVIDEND

Sierra Bancorp (Nasdaq:BSRR), parent of Bank of the Sierra, on January 22 announced that its Board of Directors has declared a regular quarterly cash dividend of $0.12 per share, representing an increase of 9% over the dividend paid last quarter and up 20% from the dividend paid a year ago.

The dividend was approved subsequent to the Board's review of the Company's financial results for the quarter and the year ended December 31, 2015, which reflect continued capital strength, improved operating results, robust growth in loans and deposits, and respectable credit quality.

The dividend will be paid on February 18, 2016, to shareholders of record as of February 4, 2016. Including dividends paid by Bank of the Sierra prior to the formation of Sierra Bancorp, the Company has paid regular cash dividends to shareholders every year since 1987, comprised of annual dividends from 1987 through 1998 and quarterly dividends since then.

The dividend noted in today's announcement marks the Company's 68th consecutive regular quarterly cash dividend.

Sierra Bancorp is the holding company for Bank of the Sierra (www.bankofthesierra.com), which is in its 39th year of operations, and at almost $1.8 billion in total assets is the largest independent bank headquartered in the South San Joaquin Valley.

The Company has over 400 employees and conducts business through 28 full-service branches, a loan production office, an online branch, a real estate industries center, an agricultural credit center, and an SBA center.

COS OFFERS FAFSA AND DREAM ACT WORKSHOPS

College of the Sequoias is pleased to offer to the community as well as current and prospective students workshops on the 2016-17 FAFSA and Dream Act Applications. Enrollment is now open and the priority deadline to file is March 2, 2016, to qualify for state aid.

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is an application used to determine financial aid available to those wishing to pursue higher education. The Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) act application is completed by students who do not meet federal eligibility requirements but qualify to apply for California state aid.

COS is hosting a series of presentations and workshops at each of our campuses. The Hanford campus presentation and workshop is February 8, 6pm to 8pm in room V105. The Tulare campus event is February 18, 6pm to 8pm in Building B, Room B121. The Visalia campus event is February 22, 6pm to 8pm in Kern 714.

Those attending the workshops should bring the following: 2015 income tax return, W-2, last pay stub, or 2014 income tax return (student and parent); spouse's income information (if married); records of untaxed income; Social Security Number.

Students and parents must also create a FSA ID. It replaces the PIN previously used to sign a FAFSA. Go to https://fsaid.ed.gov to create your FSA ID. Students and parents cannot use the same email address for the FSA ID.

For more information about office hours and FAFSA and Dream Act, please contact COS Financial Aid Outreach Specialist Amy Pimentel, 559.737.6178 or amypi@cos.edu

CORCORAN STATE PRISON SEEKS COS AS PARTNER IN EDUCATION

In 2016, College of the Sequoias will embark upon a project initiated by California State Prison, Corcoran (CSP-COR), to make college classes available at the prison and its related Substance Abuse Treatment Facility (SATF-CSP). Part of a larger, California initiative to expand education opportunities in state prisons, Corcoran officials are soliciting help from COS as an education provider.

CSP-COR and SATF-CSP are the recent recipients of an Anti-Recidivism Coalition (ARC) grant funding college courses to eligible inmate students. ARC is a non-profit organization whose mission is, in part, to improve outcomes of rehabilitation processes for California prisoners. ARC is privately funded and provides resources for a variety of activities, supporting anti-recidivism throughout California.

Correctional and education officials across the state are encouraged by studies promoting the community benefits of prison education initiatives. At San Quentin Prison, the Prison University Project (PUP)has more than 10 years of success providing 350 inmates the opportunity to earn a full Associates degree. PUP data shows that successful completion of college education classes has proven to be the most successful form of rehabilitation and anti-recidivism.

A 2013 Rand Corporation study found that those who participate in correctional education programs realized 43% lower odds of recidivating over those who did not. Further, the odds of obtaining post-release employment were 13% higher than those not participating in inmate education.

COS administrators, corrections officials, ARC and PUP personnel are working together to hire personnel, establish services and offer courses to eligible inmates. No COS funds will be expended for the program and new state legislation allows the college to collect student enrollment funding for classes offered in the prison.

No faculty, full-time or adjunct, will be diverted from serving the needs of the District to participate in the program. Work by COS faculty or staff under this grant will be on a voluntary basis and will fully adhere to current employee union contracts.

Current expectations are to have administrative staffing identified during the Spring 2016 semester. Prospective students permitted to participate in classes will be chosen by prison officials. Corcoran State Prison resides in Kings County and within the district boundaries for COS.

BANK OF THE SIERRA REPORTS BIG TOTALS FOR 2015 GRANTS

Bank of the Sierra announced that 2015 saw over $175,000 distributed to a variety of non-profit organizations throughout the 6 counties it serves. Each quarter the Bank awarded approximately 15 organizations with a grant, the amount of which was determined individually by the specific needs of the organization. Most organizations received a grant of $1,000 to $5,000.

The grant program partners with traditional non-profits, public school districts, and other local organizations. The types of projects that benefitted from the grants ranged widely, including initiatives to help underprivileged children and the elderly, housing and community building projects, cultural and educational initiatives, and environmental preservation efforts.

Kevin McPhaill, Bank President and CEO, explained his appreciation for the grant program and the organizations that benefit from it: "The Sierra Grant program hasbeen an important part of how Bank of the Sierra engages with the areas it serves. We're happy to assist with the projects these organizationsintroduce, and we're always grateful to hear ofthe many ways community members are making a difference."

About the Sierra Grant Program

Since its inception in 2004 the Sierra Grant Program has been responsible for donating over a million dollars to organizations that improve local communities. Non-profits who wish to apply for a Sierra Grant can pick up an instructional brochure at any Bank of the Sierra branch, or visit the bank's web site at www.bankofthesierra.com/resources/sierra_grant_program.

ENROLL NOW IN NINE WEEK COURSES STARTING SOON AT WEST HILLS COLLEGE

While the spring semester began at West Hills College almost a month ago, students now have another opportunity to sign up for classes.

To search for classes with open seats, visit the online course schedule at http://bit.ly/1TWsid8 and search #openseats. The search can then be narrowed down by campus or subject.

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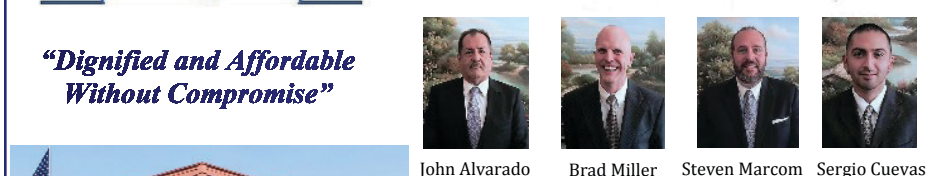
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Mathis

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The Back Story

Mathis was a truck driver for the National Guard in Iraq when his truck was blown up by an improvised explosive device (IED) in April of 2008. Mathis, who had been shaken up in an explosion nine months prior, was told by his doctor that if it he took another hit he may not live through it. In the last explosion he sustained a traumatic head injury and consequently suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder.

Because of his injuries, the Veterans Administration (VA) has rated Mathis as 100% disabled. As a result, Mathis receives $40,188 a year in VA benefits that are tax free. His wife allegedly receives $24,000 a year from the Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) to be Mathis' home health care aid.

Mathis' salary as assemblyman is $109,000 a year, in addition to the best insurance the state has to offer. He receives $168 per diem, four days a week, to pay for a residence in Sacramento. Expenses could be cut in half if he were to share an apartment, like many assemblymen do. Whatever is left over the can be pocketed, which is also tax free.

A few months into Mathis' term as assemblyman, several staff members told the *Valley Voice* they had suggested, that while he held office, he donate his VA benefits back to the VA. These former staff members said that collecting taxpayer funded benefits, and a taxpayer funded salary, had the appearance of double dipping. In addition, they felt it was not consistent with the Republican ideal of being a fiscal conservative. Everything considered, the former staff members that spoke with the *Valley Voice* were also uneasy about his wife, Aubrey, allegedly receiving $2000 a month from the WWP.

Mathis' response was, according to one former staffer, "Well, I'll think about it."

A January, 2016 court document confirms that Mathis is still collecting $3349.00 a month in VA disability benefits.

This question is - should Assemblyman Mathis collect 100% VA disability benefits while collecting his state salary, benefits, and per diem?

The Assembly has no issue with Assembly Member Mathis taking his Assembly salary while receiving VA benefits, according to Debra Gravert, chief administrative officer of the Assembly Rules Committee.

It's Not Double Dipping

For those not familiar with the VA system, being rated 100% disabled by the VA is different from collecting disability from the State of California. If one is collecting traditional disability, in most cases, it would be considered fraud to work fulltime.

On the other hand, the VA encourages injured vets to return to a normal life of raising a family, going to school or even working fulltime. The one criterion is that the veteran should be receiving treatment for their disability. Many in the veteran community who were interviewed or who left comments on the *Valley Voice* web page do not consider it double dipping to receive VA benefits and a state salary at the same time. They felt that Mathis earned them by serving his country and that it is disrespectful to suggest otherwise.

A handful of veterans wrote emails and comments on the *Valley Voice* webpage in response to a Political Fix column that criticized Mathis. John Reece wrote, "He is a war hero as far as I am concerned. Why would you begrudge him something he has so obviously earned in the heat of battle. I am a retired sailor, state employee, VA disability & social security person drawing a small pension from each. Should I pick one to live on & forgo the rest? I feel that I earned each pension as has Assy. Mathis."

Discarded signs from Mathis' 2014 campaign. Catherine Doe/Valley Voice

Richard Osborne, from Porterville College said, "Does Mr. Mathis receive VA benefits for his traumatic brain injury? I certainly hope so. Neither you nor I know the amount of that benefit, but whatever it is, it was determined by a team of qualified professionals within the VA system. Does his wife receive $2,000.00 per month from the Wounded Warrior Project? I very much doubt that . . . why don't you just ask him?"

According to Nick Guest, State Adjutant/Quartermaster from Elk Grove**,** **"**As for Mr. Mathis and his VA benefits, he earned those benefits. It is safe to say that had Mr. Mathis chose not to serve his country, he would never have received the head injury and would not be collecting benefits. I really fail to see the correlation between getting VA benefits for a Service Connected Disability and being paid as an Assemblyman."

It is Double Dipping

The Veteran's community is not a united front in supporting Mathis' receiving both his taxpayer funded salary and taxpayer funded VA Benefits. Two local veterans' advocates were dismayed to learn it was true. One advocate who is a Vietnam Vet stated, "the fact that you can double dip is legal but it is not ethical." He also added that the WWP has been in hot water lately for misuse of funds and that "Mathis' spouse receiving money while he is in Sacramento sounds suspicious."

Another veterans' advocate said, "This has personally been a great disappointment. I'm heartbroken. As a soldier you know the difference between right and wrong." He added, "your (*Valley Voice*) coverage of Mr. Mathis has been appreciated. Good insight on some matters. After 30 years myself in the United States Military, I do understand the meaning of doing what is right, simply because it is the right thing to do."

A Vietnam Vet from Porterville who is classified as 10% disabled said that he felt Mathis was being a hypocrite. He said that if Mathis is able to work fulltime in a high stress job he should give his VA money to a veteran who can't. "What about all those homeless veterans?"

The Mathis' original staff members that reached out to the *Valley Voice* said they felt he should have relinquished his VA disability benefits. *One staff member said, "I was really disappointed because Devon took that money. It was just frowned upon. This is a moral issue and there will be a backlash."*

Another former staff member said, "And yea, we told him that people don't like it when people double dip. It's that simple. Legal is not moral and it certainly flies in the face of everything he's talking about regarding veterans being taken care of. I personally think it is something that should be talked about nationally."

Mathis' former Visalia neighbor called the *Valley Voice* to request he be interviewed. During the interview he said, "As a four-year veteran myself, it upsets me to think that someone enjoying his position and salary and perks would milk the VA system. I feel he is ripping off the taxpayers."

Mathis' neighbor said he has lived at his current house for 32 years and was Devon Mathis' neighbor for two years.

Wounded Warrior Project

Another point of contention between Mathis and his original staff was the fact that his wife allegedly collects $2,000 a month from the WWP to be his caretaker. Again, there was no consensus as some constituents agreed with her collecting the WWP funds, while other did not.

A person close to the Mathis family said, "They had periodic required interviews to qualify for the WWP funds. The $2,000 is Aubrey's money from Wounded Warriors to be his caretaker."

A former staffer said he was bothered "about his wife collecting money from WWP for being a care taker while he has access to the best healthcare in the state**."**

Nick Guest wrote in an email to the *Valley Voice* in support of Mathis. "As far as what his wife gets from WWP, …. so what? WWP is a private charity and what they choose to give someone is their business. It is not government money as your article hints at, that is between her and WWP."

Mathis' Visalia neighbor was adamant in his disagreement with Guest. The neighbor was quite upset to hear about the alleged funds from the WWP and said concerning Mathis' wife taking care of him in Sacramento, "The girl must have long arms." He added that, "She doesn't assist in any way in taking care of Devon."

Mathis himself confirms his neighbor's assumptions in an April 2015 court document.

"My current wife is required to stay home full time to provide for the needs and doctor's appointments (of their newborn twins)….My wife cannot work outside the home while caring for the twins and being involved with all the associated doctors' appointments…"

The Nuclear Fourth Rail

Locals have questioned that if someone is able to handle the high-stress fulltime job of being an assemblyman, then maybe it's time for the VA to reevaluate Mathis. But questioning VA disability is a dangerous endeavor for constituents, politicians, the media and even veterans. The *Los Angeles Times* reported that, "If Social Security is the third rail of American politics, then the VA disability system is the fourth, nuclear rail."

Everyone asked was more than willing to give me their opinion, but because of the guaranteed scorn, no one wanted their name in the paper if they disagreed with Mathis, not even the veteran advocates. The former staff would not give their names out of fear for their future employment.

To put Mathis' disability in perspective, the US Congresswoman from Illinois, Tammy Duckworth, reflected that she has a lower VA disability rating--20%--than most veterans, despite having had both her legs blown off and losing significant use of her right arm when her Blackhawk helicopter was shot down.

A Tulare County veteran, who fought in the infantry in Iraq and was injured in combat, lost the use of the left side of his brain. Though years later he has gained no activity in the left side of his brain, he is only rated at 60% disabled. He did not agree with Mathis' rating of 100%, but also did not think Mathis was double dipping.

Government audits have shown that the VA benefit system has strayed far from its official purpose of compensating veterans for their lost earning capacity--but saying this out loud is taboo.

Mathis' former Visalia neighbor of two years served in the army from 1956-1960 and is retired. His wife babysat several times for the Mathis children and the families had squabbles over the Mathis' yard and their many pets. So they got to know each other quite well. The neighbor said "The taxpayers are getting ripped. Mathis never displayed any disability and is totally capable of taking care of himself."

On the other hand, Richard Goode, Mathis' Porterville college professor in 2009 said in a web post, "I would watch his knuckles go white as he dealt with the pain of his injuries. Every day he must work through the effects of his injuries. In spite of them he excelled in my classes and graduated with Honors. He has gone on to prove that even with his injuries, he will succeed."

Another web post stated, "I remember going to the VA hospital with him

MATHIS continued on **11 »**

Sheriff's Pilot, Deputy Remembered by Sheriff's Department

Staff Reports

Tulare County Sheriff Mike Boudreaux announced the death of pilot James Chavez and Deputy Scott Ballantyne following the Sheriff One crash along Highway 190 near Lake Success just after 4pm on February 10.

"Our hearts go out to the families," Boudreaux said. "They are part of the sheriff's office family."

Deputy Ballantyne was hired as a sheriff's trainee in August, 1989. He graduated from the Tulare/Kings Counties Police Academy in December, 1989, and was promoted to deputy sheriff at Sequoia Field on December 15, 1989. While working for the sheriff's office, Ballantyne worked patrol in the Porterville area and the Visalia area, at Bob Wiley Detention Facility, in the Crime Lab and the Visalia Courthouse.

In 2014, he became a deputy observer for Sheriff One. Using high-tech equipment, he was able to guide deputies on the ground in the pursuit of suspects.

Deputy Scott Ballantyne was 52 years old and lived in Visalia. He is survived by his mother, brother and sister.

Sheriff's Pilot Chavez was 45 years old. He was hired by the sheriff's office in October, 2014 to fly Sheriff One. He was hired due to his extensive aviation experience and exceptional piloting skills.

Prior to being hired, he volunteered as a pilot for the sheriff's office for more than a year.

"He loved to fly," said Boudreaux.

Chavez was an executive office aircraft maintenance officer Black Hawk pilot for the California Army Reserve National Guard 1106th TASMG Company A. He was also an aviation maintenance Company Commander UH-60 Black Hawk Pilot.

Chavez was in the Navy Reserve as an aircraft maintenance officer department head. His fulltime service was in the Army National Guard from December, 2007 to August, 2013.

He also served as commander of the Tulare County Sheriff's Aerosquadron, a group of volunteer pilots and observers, who assist with Search and Rescue, and other tasks requiring aircraft.

He is survived by his wife, and two children, ages 10 and 6. They are residents of Hanford.

Sheriff One was a light sport aircraft manufactured by Flight Design out of Connecticut. This two-seater was chosen by the sheriff's office because of its reliability, history of performance, safety features and low-cost to operate. It was delivered to the sheriff's office in August, 2011 and, since then, logged more than 3,000 hours of flight time in Tulare County.

It was the department's "Eyes in the Sky," helping deputies on the ground to locate criminals. Sheriff One crashed February 10, just after completing a mission where a suspect who had brandished a weapon was apprehended by deputies on the ground.

Prior to the crash, there was no distress signal from the plane and its parachute was not deployed. The FAA is investigating the crash.

Funerals are planned for the fallen personnel. The first will be on Saturday, February 20, for Pilot James Chavez in Hanford. The second will be in Visalia on Monday, February 22, for Deputy Scott Ballantyne.

Anyone wishing to donate to the families, may contact the Tulare County Deputy Sheriff's Benevolent Association.

Matheny Tract. Courtesy/Google Street View

Water Resources Control Board to Hold Meetings on Matheny Tract

Staff Reports

On February 1, the State Water Resources Control Board (SWCB) announced that two public meetings will be held next month--on March 3 and 17, both from 6-8pm--at Palo Verde School, 9637 Avenue 196 in Tulare. The SWCB will provide information on proposed actions, answer questions and accept comments and testimony from the public.

At issue is the water supply of Matheny Tract, south of Tulare.

Water from old wells in Matheny Tract contained arsenic at levels unsafe for consumption. Pratt Mutual Water Company currently serves roughly 280 homes there.

In 2013, a water main was installed connecting Matheny Tract to Tulare's municipal system. This was paid for by a $4.9 million Proposition 84 state grant. In 2014, the City of Tulare proposed selling the water wholesale to Pratt, which was to assume the responsibility of metering and billing.

But attorneys for Pratt and Matheny Tract residents oppose this, seeking instead a consolidation of the two systems.

Now the SWCB might order Tulare to wholesale to Pratt. A trial is set for April.

In 2015, the City of Tulare sued Pratt and others, including the county and the Matheny Tract Committee, citing legal and technical that need to be resolved before water can be put into the new main. While wholesaling may still be a bone of contention, occasional low water pressure remains problematic.

Although recently dropped from the suit in late January, the Tulare County Board of Supervisors agreed to support a motion of summary judgment. Such a motion could result in an order requiring the City of Tulare to fill the new main.

According to the terms of the original contract between Tulare and Pratt, the city agreed to consolidate the systems. The city has since changed its mind.

The residents of Matheny Tract, frustrated by what they perceive as delays caused by the City of Tulare, may soon see this impasse resolved. Water may flow through the new main, but the question is whether or not the accommodation will meet their approval.

Mathis

Continued from p. 10

[Mathis] because of continuous excruciating headaches and body that would give way to the point that he would have to be drug or picked up and carried due to his injuries. Instead of choosing drugs so willingly offered by the doctors, he chose to work hard to try to overcome the damage that he received in protecting the rights of all, even those who so insultingly oppose veterans' receiving some compensation for bodily damage(s) received in battle."

Staffers who worked closely with Mathis, including 12-hour days, over-nighters, weekends and road trips, agreed that Mathis could be disabled in some capacity, but could not readily see what it was. Two former staffers and a veterans' advocate who worked closely with Mathis on his 2014 campaign responded when questioned about what was his disability, "I really don't know." Another staffer said that Mathis' disability might be that he has trouble with memorization, writing and reading a speech from a prepared document. "He is better at doing speeches off the cuff," he said.

Mathis, himself, declared he was perfectly healthy during a child custody dispute with his ex-wife. Mathis submitted in a court hearing an evaluation of his health by a licensed clinical social worker. It states, "Devon appears to be in good physical health. He states he eats balanced meals and has a membership at a local gym where he frequently works out. … While in Iraq he was treated for a concussion he received when he hit a road side bomb. Subsequently Devon was awarded a Purple Heart. Other than occasional headaches he has no other complaints."

A social worker may not have the medical degree to diagnose PTSD or a traumatic brain injury, but Mathis submitted her evaluation under penalty of perjury to tell the court that, in his opinion, he was perfectly healthy.

CONCLUSION

There are no clear answers. The bottom line is that it is not illegal to receive money from several different government sources funded by the taxpayers, but is it ethical? Is it in-line with being a fiscally conservative Republican?

On the other hand, in deciding not to donate his benefits back to the VA while in office, Assemblyman Mathis did what was in the best economic interest for his large family, Yet, he made big item purchases that add up to more than an assemblyman makes, rendering the debate mute. Mathis has to collect the extra money to pay his bills. He bought a brand new $75,000 truck in 2014, and a new home in an upscale Visalia neighborhood in 2015 as listed on his child support financial disclosure form. Republicans tend to agree that his large family and big ticket items are not the taxpayers' problem.

In conclusion, if questioned about his being fit enough to be an assemblyman, or fit enough for joint custody of his kids from his first wife, then he is perfectly healthy. When questions arose about whether he should keep his VA disability benefits while in office, he was depicted as a veteran coping with PTSD and a traumatic head injury.

In most people's lives, such personal issues as income and medical conditions remain private. But Mathis is a public servant and his money is the people's money. His constituents have a right to know, and as taxpayers have a right to discuss how their money is spent.

Several attempts have been made to reach Mathis for comment. Upon the first, when he was actually contacted, he said he was busy and asked that an appointment be made through his scheduler in Sacramento. Upon reaching Brittney Kreuzer**,** the scheduler, she requested that an e-mail request be made per their policy.

On a follow-up call several days later, Kreuzer said that the matter was being reviewed and that she could not schedule an appointment until it was approved.

On February 12, another call was placed to Mathis' Sacramento office when Justin Turner, legislative director, was reached. He responded that the office and Mathis were very busy at this time, and asked what the call was regarding.

When told it was with regard to Mathis' VA disability Turner said, "Oh, that's you guys. Several people called the day that article came out.

We were asked, "Can't you fix it?'" he said.

The *Valley Voice* responded that this was the opportunity for Mathis to address the matter. No response has thus far been made.

Nancy Vigran contributed to this article.

Voices of the Valley

Cheri Taylor

Jan M. Krafve

"Cheri Taylor comes from a long line of stubborn Highlander Scots!" is the very first statement on her bio sheet.

Isn't it interesting how people perceive themselves and yet others around them may see something quite different? Expounding upon the word stubborn brings out words like dedicated and strong-willed, or firmly planted and adamant.

According to recognition given by her peers, Cheri Taylor has been a rock; a pillar in the community, especially when it comes to protecting and caring for the rights of the elderly.

She has served as executive director of Porterville Adult Day Services (PADS) for the past 26 years. PADS services the caregivers of southern Tulare County along with adults who cannot stay home alone, including those with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia.

Taylor has also served in Leadership Porterville in 1997, 1999 and 2007, and Kings/Tulare Area Agency on Aging Advisory Council from 2001-2015, where she was chairman of the board for seven years. She was on the Tulare Social Service Transportation Advisory Council from 1998-2005.

Taylor was recognized by the Porterville Chamber of Commerce as Woman of the Year in 1999. She was also recognized by Zonta International as Woman of the Year in 1997.

In 2007, Taylor received the Paul Harris Fellowship Award from Rotary International for her work at PADS for improving the services of the caregivers and elderly in Tulare County.

Here's Taylor's story in her own words.

"I grew up in Riverside, California. My grandparents owned most of the land where UC Riverside now stands. My childhood was normal for any kid growing up on a ranch in Southern California. We had a lot of animals to take care of--rabbits, pigeons, cats, dogs, fish, horses and even a donkey.

One of my favorite memories is riding horses with my family. I have a cherished picture where I'm riding behind my grandmother, holding on to her waist, and my little sister is nestled in front of my mother on her horse. I felt so privileged to grow up listening to my grandparents tell stories about their lives and how they grew up. I valued the memories they shared, even when I was little.

"We were a hard working, middle class, American family. Education was extremely important, especially to my mother. After high school, I went to Riverside City College and then to San Diego State, which became a University right before I graduated in 1974. It was an especially fun time to be in college. Streaking had become very popular, so we would leave class 10 minutes early and line the sidewalks, wondering who or how many students would be running naked through the center of campus that day. I did not participate.

"I supported myself through college by working at Marie Calendar's. After graduation I became manager of one of their restaurants. I met my first husband then, who was in the same line of work, but for a different company. We had two children, Brock and Amy.

For a while we worked together at the Huntington Harbor Beach Club. I was the banquet manager. I did a lot of cooking and catering for weddings and parties that had privately booked one of our tour boats to cruise the harbor. I wasn't happy in that line of business and really wanted to work in my field of studies, gerontology."

Cheri Taylor is the executive director of Porterville Adult Day Services.

Taylor described how the personal trials in her life influenced her choices and led her to where she is today.

"As a young child, I was diagnosed with severe scoliosis and went through some pretty tough surgeries while growing up. At one point, I actually had a near-death experience during one of the operations. I learned that I was alive for a reason and that it was important for me to find that reason and dedicate my life to it.

Suddenly, being alive became an "E" ticket ride. I was blessed. I believe, even at that young age, that it was my purpose to take care of the elderly. I knew I could face death, and therefore I could provide care for other people until they passed. This was something I could handle, and I knew I wanted to be present around others, older than I was, even if they were close to that time of their life.

"From there I began working with different church youth programs. The people liked my interaction with the kids, so they encouraged and assisted me to further my education at Claremont School of Theology. I had two little children to take care of. Can you believe that I packed each of my kids a small suitcase and brought them with me to class? They were so well behaved the professors let me continue to do so until I graduated with my Masters of Art in Religious Education. I continued my ministry with youth and children in the church for many years, but I still felt like I wasn't fulfilling my purpose in life."

Taylor explained how she came to live in Porterville and how she found PADS.

"The theater had always played a major part of my upbringing. We went to almost all of the Broadway shows that toured the Los Angeles area. So, of course, I joined the local theatrical companies just as soon as I could. My passion is to sing, so I tried out and was cast in several musical productions. That's where I met my soul mate and husband of 30 years, Reverend Warren Taylor.

"Warren and I moved here in 1990 when he became the Pastor of the First Congregational Church of Porterville. The pastor who recruited him was the same man who started Porterville Adult Day Services and was ready to retire from the position of director. Warren told him about me and my background and schooling, so I interviewed with him and I got the job.

Back then, we were only open a few hours a week. Immediately, I started the process of expanding, obtaining a non-profit status, licensing and grants. I could see the many possibilities that PADS could do for the elders in our community. It's been 26 years and we're just starting the process of expansion again!"

According to Taylor, "PADS takes care of the caregivers of Tulare County, and those they care for. We are the umbrella that offers many facets of support for the caregiver. It can come in the form of transportation or nutritional programs for the ones we care about.

We also offer conferences, workshops, training and the necessary CEU's (Certified Education Units) for people working in related professional fields. We provide counseling and individual case management services to assist the caregiver or family. All of those services we offer for the caregiver are completely free. Any time a caregiver walks through our front door, or calls to ask us a question, it's our responsibility to find the answer or give them the necessary tools they may need to find the answer themselves."

Taylor then discussed the Adult Day Service Program they currently provide.

"We're probably best known around the county for our on-site day care center for adults who cannot stay home alone. We are recognized for our focus, primarily on patients with dementia and Alzheimer's disease, although we serve many other adults who've had other issues.

"When the person needing care first comes to our program, we provide individualized, personal care plans tailored to suit their needs. We design these care plans around their special talents, experience and education. As they participate in our program, care plans may be adjusted. The object is to keep the family member who needs care at home, rather than prematurely placing them into a facility. Our major focus is to give respite to the caregiver who is often worn out and tired from the demands of balancing a family, a career, and eldercare, too.

"Our services are available to people who reside anywhere in the county of Tulare. We can pick up your loved one from the front door of your home and bring them back again, with transportation provided by PADS. They can also be brought to and from our facility by the caregiver/family member.

"We attempt to provide all the services, along with the comfort they find at home, when they're in our care. We do activities each day that stimulate their mind; we serve a nutritionally balanced lunch and snacks. We feature group recreational activities, exercises, games and crafts. We'll bathe clients daily, if so requested. All of these things are to support the fact that socialization is one of the primary ways to slow down the effects of dementia and other related diseases."

Taylor then turned the focus of the interview to make the following announcement:

"In today's world, we're finding that the needs of our clients are expanding and so is PADS. We'll be officially changing our name to Valley Adult Day Services, since the people that we serve come from all four corners of the county."

Taylor said, excitedly, "We are now in the process of expanding and becoming a Health Care Facility-Medical-Adult Day Program. We'll be able to assist with the health issues of the people, 55 and over, when they come here. Just this week we started the process of obtaining our new license from the Department of Health and The Department of Social Services.

'We'll have a full-time registered nurse on-site who will work with each client's physician, making sure that they receive occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech therapy, or other medical treatments, if needed. MediCal will cover the cost of these services; there will be no charge to the clients or to the families. Our new program will also have a full-time social worker on-site as well. Mental Health and the Veteran's Administration will also be working with us as we venture forward.

"I'm ready to start all of the new growth for our organization. Change isn't always easy and the process may be tedious but knowing that we'll be better able to provide for the elderly in our county makes it all worthwhile. "

She paused for a moment as she reflected upon her life, and then she commented, "Looking back, I've come to realize how much having my grandparents be such an integral part of my childhood directed my desire to work with the elderly. I loved sitting in the kitchen and watching my grandmother cook. I couldn't do a lot of physical things the other children could do. She would tell me stories about being a barrel racer at the rodeo when she was young. I was fascinated.

"Now that I'm a grandmother, I've come to know that the passing down of our memories is an important part of the aging process for both the elder and the child. Sometimes, when I walk into PADS and hear someone telling a story about their life, I have to stop, sit down, and ask them to tell it to me from the beginning."

Viewpoint

Donald Trump: A Modern-day Populist…Or Cynical Self-Promoter?

As a retired Political Science Professor and life-long "political junkie" I have followed with avid interest Donald Trump's emergence as the front runner for the 2016 Republican presidential nomination. Trump has displayed an uncanny ability to dominate the political spotlight since announcing his candidacy back in July 2015. He has influenced the behavior and actions of his Republican rivals setting the tone and tenor for the current campaign cycle.

Trump's dominance raises a fundamental question: What drives the charismatic billionaire real estate mogul-turned-presidential contender? Trump presents himself as a different kind of candidate. Exploiting widespread dissatisfaction over growing income inequality and fear of domestic terrorism Trump fancies himself a modern-day Populist with promises "to make America great again."

Trump's behavior is reminiscent of the Populist movement—a late nineteenth century revolt against the political establishment. This grass-roots movement dominated by farmers in the Midwest and the South—all of whom expressed extreme anger over a depressed American economy dominated by monopolist railroads and huge corporations. The Populists called for a series of reforms, including regulation of the railroads and big business along with democratization of the political process. These same Populists revealed a less enlightened side—an extreme fear of foreigners and strong anti-black tendencies.

An array of colorful charismatic individuals sought office under the Populist banner. "Pitchfork" Ben Tillman a crusading governor from South Carolina utilized inflammatory rhetoric in attacking sitting president Grover Cleveland. Tillman threatened to use a pitchfork to prod the conservative president into action—labeling him "an old bag of beef." Even more famous, William Jennings Bryan, a Congressman from Nebraska earned the nickname "Boy Orator of the Platt." Critics characterized Bryan as akin to the Midwestern river "wide in the mouth, but shallow in depth." Bryan, however, proved extremely popular. In 1896 both the fledgling Populist Party and the more established Democratic Party nominated him for president. Bryan lost overwhelmingly to conservative Republican William McKinley in the general election. Despite this, Bryan and the Populists paved the way for an era of Progressive reform in the early twentieth century.

Trump's actions and rhetoric are also like those of a series of colorful political figures, who emerged during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Among these anti-establishment neo-populists was authoritarian Louisiana Governor Huey Long, who assailed Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal as inadequate. Long promoted his own radical program of income redistribution, labeled "share our wealth" designed to "make every man a king." Long was poised to run against FDR in 1936 when an assassin's bullet cut short his campaign. Retired California physician Francis Townsend excoriated Franklin Roosevelt's failure to help elderly Americans. Townsend called for a comprehensive old age pension. Charles Coughlin, a charismatic Catholic Priest who presented his message over the radio airways, condemned the president for ignoring the undue concentration of wealth held by Wall Street bankers. Coughlin pejoratively labeled the New Deal—"The Jew Deal." Other critics called for rounding up all foreign Latino farm workers and sending them back to Mexico. Roosevelt responded to such critics by expanding his reform agenda, ushering in the Second New Deal.

Trump like the Populists has consistently railed against the political establishment, while spewing forth a constant stream of inflammatory rhetoric. His brand of Populism tinged with authoritarian, ultra-nationalist, anti-foreigner tendencies is reminiscent of earlier Populists. Trump targets particular ethnic-religious minorities whom he deems undesirable. This is evident in his clarion call for banning all Muslims from entering the country, building a wall across our southern border to deny entry to undesirable Latinos, and high protective tariff directed against Chinese imports.

Trump's so-called reform agenda contains few other specifics causing one to question his basic motives in seeking the presidency. Is he truly altruistic, sincere in his assertion to improve American society or in his own words—"to make America great again"?

Granted, Trump has reportedly spent over $12 million of his own fortune while expressing a willingness to spend much more. This raises an even more basic question: Is the billionaire business mogul truly serious in his quest of the American presidency? Trump's deliberate demeaning of religious-ethnic minorities, women, and even the developmentally disabled; combined with his vindictively–driven personal attacks on political opponents belie the behavior of a less-than-serious candidate. They suggest the tactics of a calculating mischief-maker determined to exceed the boundaries of acceptable civil discourse, on a repeated basis. This, in turn, raises yet another question: Is Donald Trump's presidential campaign simply about Donald Trump?

In other words: Is all this a cynical act of self promotion by an ego-driven reality show host seeking to transpose to the political arena his celebrity persona? Or is it simply another opportunity to market the so-called "Trump brand"—be it hotels, casinos, and myriad of other consumer products? Clearly, Trump is thoroughly enjoying his time in the national spotlight as a presidential contender. In the end, Donald Trump will emerge as a winner, whatever the outcome.

Newell G. Bringhurst, a retired professor of history and Political Science from College of the Sequoias welcomes responses at newellgb@hotmail.com

"Donald Trump Pimps Out Veterans"

As a veteran, I feel Donald Trump has prostituted us. My opinion comes because I feel he uses current empathy for veterans to his political purposes. I don't like that he lumps us into one category and he says he can help. There are a large number of veterans in America. We are very diverse and have different opinions on issues.

We are vets from WWII, Korean War, Vietnam War, and the Middle East Wars and from other periods of recent history. We are of all races, ages, sex and sexual orientation.

I believe many vets feel as I do. Trump has shown to be disingenuous towards vets. In order to lump us together, he first uses the terminology of "the veterans".

What are we, cows? He was a Vietnam War era youth, but what did he do when we were called to service? He has no history to have empathy for us.

Early in his campaign for President, he promoted an event for "the veterans" that was put together by another promoter who created an entity that uses Veterans in its name. His stage was on the deck of a tourist attraction Battle Ship. The promoter, using the name "veteran", in its name turned out to be an organization of one person. This person took off with monies raised disingenuously by Trump, as the organization had no members and no method to distribute money to vets.

Did Trump care. No, his agenda didn't include benefiting vets. His agenda was for his own promotion, while pimping vets to get it done. Recently, Trump decided to skip a national debate event because he was treated badly. I don't think he knows what treated badly is. So, with only a few days, he organized a competing event on the same day as the national debate. His draw was to be "the veterans".

Did he care about vets? No, it was for his own political purposes. Contributions were to be deposited in a Trump Foundation account, not to veterans groups. His stated purpose was to help "the veterans". When actually, he needed a draw to gain television ratings and an audience. He sold thousands of tickets for a 700 seat auditorium.

He could then have thousands wanting to get in, claiming he was helping "the veterans". Prostituted again by the Pimp. In his speeches, he says he is going to help "the poor veterans", who are treated so badly. I'm afraid if he does anything for us, it will be counterproductive. If he were successful, he may reverse the gains the VA has made in veteran care. He may privatize us. The VA should not be privatized. Most of us go to the VA for mental health and medical care because we would rather go where we are with other vets and we are treated with respect and given quality care, not the overbooked private clinics where insurance and pharmaceutical companies run the care protocols private doctors have to follow.

There are a lot of reasons Trump should not be president. His disingenuous use of veterans for his political purposes is tops on my list. This is ahead of the fact that he is arrogant, self-serving, conceited and self-centered.

Curtis Christensen

WAAAHHHH…but we don't wanna get arrested!!

As the macho, gun-toting, testosterone-addled cowboys who took over the wildlife refuge in Oregon call it quits, their pitiful whine can be heard all the way to Florida: "Waaahhh…but we don't wanna get arrested…"

So much for the rugged-individualists and badass proponents of personal responsibility.

Let's see what happens as their armed insurrection winds down. How will the system treat the militant bullyboys?

Will they get pepper-sprayed in the face as did the college students peacefully sitting in a driveway at UC Davis during Occupy protests, or shot in the head with a police projectile as did Veterans For Peace member Scott Olson in Oakland?

Will they get two months in jail like Ed Kinane for stepping across a line at the School of the Americas; or six months in jail like grandmother Mary Anne Grady, for taking pictures of demonstrators outside the Reaper drone base in upstate NY; or a $20,000 fine like Kathy Kelly's peace group, for taking medicine to people in Iraq before we invaded their country in 2003; or 10 years in prison for speaking out against the madness of World War One, like Gene Debs;

Will they be clubbed in the head, set on by German shepherds, slammed up against light poles by fire hoses like the kids demonstrating for civil rights in Alabama, or killed by vigilante executioners and buried in a dike for registering voters?

If they go to jail, will they conduct a peaceful hunger strike and endure force-feeding like Alice Paul and Rose Winslow did for demanding women get the right to vote?

If they are arrested, chances are very good that nothing like the above will happen to any of the massively-armed, good 'ol boys in Oregon who would be the first to tell you they were only making a statement of conscience against government gone amuck.

But when the students at UC Davis, or Kathy Kelly, or Ed Kinane, or Gene Debs, or the civil rights protesters, or the suffragists, all unarmed and committed to nonviolence, conducted their protests they did so with the understanding they may well suffer serious bodily harm and at the very least be arrested and sentenced.

They treated the police, the prosecutors and the judges with utmost respect. They did not plead to lesser charges but underwent trials in hopes of educating more people about the evils against which they fought.

So let's see how the Rambo wannabes of Eastern Oregon handle themselves. Seems they could use a few lessons in toughness from nonviolent peace and justice activists.

Mike Ferner served as a hospital corpsman during the Viet Nam war.

In 2006 he participated in a five-week, water-only fast with Kathy Kelly and Ed Kinane to protest the war in Iraq and was also convicted of two felonies for painting "Troops Out Now" on a highway overpass, which cost him two months house arrest and $5,000.

Comments & Letters

"Water Solutions" from District 1 Candidate Angel Galvez

Angel Galvez

When asked by the constituents why do you feel voters should elect you as the Board of Supervisor District 1?

To solve the issues affected by drought in Tulare County, Tulare County leaders will need to make sound decisions on water infrastructure. That is why long term solutions are essential to water infrastructure planning and development. Measures like, recycling water, water conservation; drip irrigation and residential sprinkler use schedules all help in the development of using less water. However, if we are to speak about growth as it relates to agriculture, dairy, or economic development, much larger innovative initiatives need to be in place. A long term solution to our county's water crisis is the Tulare County Beaver Reservoir Project (TCBRP), a term Angel Galvez Board of Supervisor District 1 Candidate uses to describe his project for the benefit of the people of Tulare County.

As part of my research and development for improving communities throughout Tulare County, I consider water infrastructure to be the top priority. Water is an essential element we can not go without. As part of Gov. Jerry Brown's budget proposal of the approved $7.5 billion water bond, he identified how he would like the money spent. The bond earmarked $2.7 billion for 'Storage' projects (Paul Rogers, San Jose Mercury News 2015) which in simple terms translates to reservoir infrastructure. And a Storage Project indeed is the answer for Tulare County.

Angel Galvez

Reservoiring in the higher sierra serves various benefits for our county. Storage of usable water is available during the dry years and also helps sustain wild life in their natural habitat. These reservoirs--built on natural Meadows--can be constructed environmentally and fiscally sound. Due to severe drought, dead trees can be cut into large square beams and placed as diversion walls and dam walls to capture and hold water during heavy wet years. This process mimics much like beavers do it but in a much larger scale. In that way the Forrest benefits from potential fire hazards in dry years and wildlife is preserved as well in the process.

This innovative plan is the salvation of the county's future from becoming the next dust bowl. A project like this would yield the necessary water needed for farmers during the dry years, it would provide sustainable water for large development projects, and sustain wildlife in their natural environments. The TCBRP benefits the people from this county and will lead the way for the San Joaquin Valley as well. The world will depend on it.

Angel Galvez is a candidate for Board of Supervisors District 1

The comments below are from "**Political Fix (4 February, 2016)**"

"Another Combat Wounded Veteran's perspective. I find it very troubling that I, as a combat wounded Veteran, am expected to stay home after being severely wounded. All the benefits that I receive, won't make my arm grow back, won't take away the nightmares, won't give my short term memory back or make my life the way it was prior to injury. I wish that were true, but it isn't. Our lives will never be the same, forever changed. We could just stay home, and rot away doing prescription drugs (or nonprescription), put the bottle to our head and pull the trigger and maybe live a life thinking back on how great it was when we were barrel chested freedom fighters. Or, we can choose to make a positive impact. For you to degrade the sacrifice Mr. Mathis made on behalf of all of us, to include you is frightening to read. For you to say that those who are injured on the battlefield shouldn'd be placed in leadership positions sets anyone with disabilities back. To me, it says to all of who served in combat that we don't deserve the benefits, nor are we good enough for employment so we should just stay home. In this case, I'm sure those who aren't fans of Mr. Mathis would love that. Mr. Mathis has overcome adversity like so many other Combat Wounded Veterans. Instead of applauding him, we get this article instead."

— Norbie Lara

"The remarks that have been made by Ms. Doe truly shows the mentality of one who has never had or been willing to write a check for everything including their life for their country. Then having to endure the ridicule and disdain from those that you risked your life to protect their right to have the freedom to their opinion no matter how wrong or warped it may be. Assemblyman Mathis wrote that check to serve his country when called and paid a high price in doing so. The fact that he is disabled in some ways does not negate his ability or desire to continue to serve his country and constituency! The fact that he collects for his disabilities has nothing to do with his crusade for the Veterans in this state, or his ability to represent us in Sacramento. Being a Vietnam Veteran 69-70 myself, I can relate to the noises being made by Ms. Doe, I too can remember being called names and being spit at in airports, and on the streets and all for doing my duty and serving my country. Now I like many others of our time and war are put on the back burner, ignored, and put on hold to get what we earned from a people and government that would just rather us disappear. Assemblyman Mathis earned his disability serving our country and has a right to it and has a right to also be paid to continue to serve us in Sacramento! An honest days pay for an honest days work. Ms. Doe, let Assemblyman Mathis do his job, and maybe instead of trying to smear his name for some disgruntled former staffer that probably is getting ready to run for the Assembly; you should be trying to do something positive for your country!"

— Dennis Sirkin

"As the former Secretary of Veterans Affairs for California, I applaud Assemblyman Mathis for pursuing his education after his military service, despite his disabling injuries, and for sponsoring this legislation to help other California veterans receive the benefits for which they are eligible. There are many veterans who have fallen through the cracks and need assistance in understanding the benefits available to them and the process to access those benefits. Veteran Service Organizations, like AMVETS, VFW, American Legion and others plus the California Department of Veterans Affairs and County Veterans Service Officers work hard on behalf of veterans to assure that they can receive these benefits but more needs to be done. This bill will help in that regard. Ms. Doe has done a disservice to all veterans, and indeed to all persons with some disability, by suggesting that their willingness to go beyond their disability to achieve a greater purpose in life should require of them additional sacrifices."

— Tom Johnson

"Ms Doe's remarks are from "former staff". Obviously there is a reason for that as clearly stated throughout this article. It's election time again and they have a runner to endorse with negative attacks on the Incumbent. The attacks on Mr Mathis by the writer are cheap shots and show a lack of professionalism, as well as being an unrespectful attack on Disabled Veterans. Mr Mathis fights hard for the Veterans and is doing excellent work for them in Sacramento. I trust the readers of this paper will see the article for what it is and take it with a grain of salt."

— Debby Fiori

"Good Evening
I am in Viet Nam Vet 1967-1969 USMC Infantry
I lost 14 Killed and 34 wounded by North Vietnamese Communist.
56,000 Americans were killed in War.
Worse 80,000 Vietnam Veterans have killed themselves sinc 1972.
PS
Both my sons are combat Vets Dave 32 USMC Iraq 2007 and Afghanistan 2009
Peter 28 USA Rangers 2013-2014 Afghanistan, Son in Law Brian Senior Chief soon to be Chief Warrant Officer 2"

— Christian York

"I note that you did not qualify your sources, was "former staffer" an effective employee? Was he terminated or did he resign? What was the military service performed by the referrence Veteran ? Did it include a combat tour? I suggest the military medals of Mr.Nathis and his experiences be compared with thosed of the rerterrenced Vet. Most of all I suggest that in order to be creditable you should do your research before publishing such a critical article
Your article is so typical of those in your industry who have not been in the service of our Country and don't understand the cost and the individual efforts required to maintain our freedom."

— Bob Wyllie

"I have known Devon Mathis since 2009 when he was a student in several of my classes at Porterville College (PC), and feel compelled to comment on the editorial entitled "Debbie Does Double Dipping." Editorials, I realize, represent the personal views of the author and as such, are not constrained to factual boundaries. The allegations in this piece regarding Mr. Mathis' financial situation come from an unnamed former staff member (or members), and fall into the category of hearsay, not fact. Then, based upon that hearsay, the editorial goes on to suggest improprieties on his part. Here are a few facts regarding Assemblyman Mathis:

1. On two different occasions, he was "blown up" by roadside bombs (IEDs) while serving with the United States Army in Iraq. The result of these incidents was a diagnosis of traumatic brain injury.
2. When he returned home he used his GI Bill benefits to earn an AA degree at Porterville College and later, a BA at Fresno State. While at PC, he was a member of Phi Theta Kappa, the national honor society for community colleges, and he maintained a high grade point average throughout his college career.
3. Mr. Mathis became an advocate for veterans during his college years and was in the forefront of veterans' affairs at both schools.
4. In 2014 he won a hard-fought race for the District 26 Assembly seat.

In my mind, the above represent an honorable and laudable behavioral progression. Does Mr. Mathis receive VA benefits for his traumatic brain injury? I certainly hope so. Neither you nor I know the amount of that benefit, but whatever it is, it was determined by a team of qualified professionals within the VA system. Does his wife receive $2,000.00 per month from the Wounded Warrior Project? I very much doubt that . . . why don't you just ask him?"

— Richard Osborne

Comments & Letters

Responses to "Political Fix/Debbie Does Double Dipping"

Ms. Doe,

As usual the press gets it all wrong, when it comes to veterans and veterans issues. First let me try to explain the million dollar request. That money would be used for grants to Veterans Service Organizations in California that are Congressionally Chartered and maintain Service Offices in California. The State already helps fund County Veteran Service Offices and this would help organizations like the VFW, American Legion, DAV, MOPH and others to expand what they are already doing. Which is help veterans get through the "red tape" at the VA to get the benefits they have earned and are entitled too. Other states help fund the VSOs in their states. California does not. The VFW and other VSOs help bring back into the California economy much more than they spend. But with a continuing war casualties and older veterans needing more and more help with the VA. We need help training and staffing our offices.

As for Mr. Mathis and his VA benefits, he earned those benefits. It is safe to say that had Mr. Mathis chose not to serve his country, he would never have received the head injury and would not be collecting benefits.

I really fail to see the correlation between getting VA benefits for a Service Connected Disability and being paid as an Assemblyman. This is a man who served his country and was severely wounded and was granted a 100% disability (per your article) an instead of lying around feeling sorry for himself and moaning and groaning about what a raw deal, he has chosen to continue to serve his country and his state and his district. He should be lauded for this, not slandered.

As far as what his wife gets from WWP, again per your article, so what. WWP is a private charity and what they choose to give someone is their business. It is not government money as your article hints at, that is between her and WWP.

I have met Assemblyman Mathis and I have nothing but the utmost respect for him. Because you see, I too am a disabled veteran and I too am working and getting a monthly check from the VA. Please in the future get all of the pertinent information and then lay it out in a fair and unbiased way. Instead of a one sided hit piece like you just wrote.

Sincerely;

Nick Guest PSC
State Adjutant/Quartermaster
National Chaplain

I read your rant from the Valley Voice (4 February – which isn't even here yet. What's up with that?). At the end, I couldn't understand what the heck you were talking about. Typical media talking head with nothing to say and pages and pages to say it.

But I take particular issue with your hit piece on Mr. Mathis.

I'm retired from the military.

I'm also retired from SMUD so I have a PERS retirement.

I also draw social security.

These are not welfare programs. I earned every penny. It was part of my salary. In the case of SS, that was taken out of my salary.

I have to pay taxes on all of this even though I paid the taxes when I earned the benefits.

If I had been injured while in the military I would also have VA benefits. That is part of the benefit package. I would not have to give up the other retirement benefits. THEY WERE ALL EARNED. THEY ARE NOT WELFARE.

It's NOT like drawing disability at work and then working on the side.

If you can't understand the difference between "double dipping" and actually earning benefits, you should be doing a little research instead of listening to disgruntled staffers fired for incompetence.

And if you were yelling at the TV during the debates, you know how the rest of us feel every time the Dems open their mouths.

Not very respectfully

Chuck Jamison
http://www.2jamisons.com/

Dear Catherine,

Obviously you are not a veteran and have never been in combat. A fellow veteran would not take the view of, or spew such contempt for another combat wounded soldier's disability, or the compensation he receives as a result of the injuries he received in combat.

If you were in an accident (not your fault) and were receiving treatment and compensation as a result of the injuries you received. Would you give the compensation back to the insurance company if you had a job and were working? I think not!!!!!!!!

I sincerely think you need to ask your doctor to evaluate you for a "diamondectomy". You need one.

LCDR, Wayne Wright, USN, Ret.

I don't believe your article on Assy. Mathis. He is a war hero as far as I am concerned. Why would you begrudge him something he has so obviously earned in the heat of battle. I am a retired sailor, state employee, VA disability & social security person drawing a small pension from each. Should I pick one to live on & forgo the rest. I feel that I earned each pension as has Assy. Mathis. I don't particularly care for accusations from unnamed sources. If his staff feels strongly that he is doing something immoral why do they still work for him, or is this the grumblings of a former employee who has been " let go" by Assy. Mathis? Please ensure that your sources don't have an axe to grind. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely

John Reece, Quadruple dipper

"I am disturbed with Ms. Doe's comments about Assemblyman Mathis. I have known Devon Mathis for several years. I have had the pleasure of having him in my classes at Porterville College. I would watch his knuckles go white as he dealt with the pain of his injuries. Every day he must work through the effects of his injuries. In spite of them he excelled in my classes and graduated with Honors. He has gone on to prove that even with his injuries, he will succeed.

Mr. Mathis is a combat Veteran who was severely injured while serving in a war zone. He is entitled to the compensation. His term in the legislature will eventually end but these injuries will be with him for the rest of his life and we do not know what the long term effects of those injuries will be.

He is now in a position to advocate for others who have served. This is desperately needed. The Military has never done a good job of transitioning Vets from active service to civilian life. Those Veterans who were injured while serving have, until recently, been left to figure it out on their own. We need people like Mr. Mathis who understand, can advocate for them, and make the transition easier. We need to reach out to those Vets who have slipped through the cracks. With 22 Veterans committing suicide every day, Vets need all the help we can provide.

From my experiences with Mr. Mathis, I would have to say that he is in a better position to serve his constituents and Veterans than many others in the legislature. Do his injuries affect his job? Yes, they do! They drive him to set the bar higher, work harder, and to achieve more."

— *Professor Richard Goode* *on* ***Political Fix (4 February, 2016)***

Veteran's Corner

Review of Discharge from Military Service

Joe Wright

Each of the military services maintains a discharge review board with authority to change, correct or modify discharges or dismissals not issued by a sentence of a general court-martial. The board has no authority to address medical discharges.

The veteran or, if the veteran is deceased or incompetent, the surviving spouse, next of kin or legal representative, may apply for a review of discharge by writing to the military department concerned, using DD Form 293, "Application for the Review of Discharge from the Armed Forces of the United States." This form may be obtained from the Internet or from our office.

However, if the discharge was more than 15 years ago, a veteran must petition the appropriate Service's Board for Correction of Military Records using DD Form 149, "Application for Correction of Military Records Under the Provisions of Title 10, U.S. Code, Section 1552." A discharge review is conducted by a review of an applicant's record and, if requested, by a hearing before the board.

Discharges awarded as a result of a continuous period of unauthorized absence in excess of 180 days make persons ineligible for VA benefits regardless of action taken by discharge review boards, unless VA determines there were compelling circumstances for the absence. Boards for the Correction of Military Records also may consider such cases.

Veterans with disabilities incurred or aggravated during active duty may qualify for medical or related benefits regardless of separation and characterization of service. Veterans separated administratively under other than honorable conditions may request that their discharge be reviewed for possible recharacterization, provided they file their appeal within 15 years of the date of separation.

Our office can provide forms and directions on how request a review. Questions regarding the review of a discharge should be addressed to the appropriate discharge review board at the address listed on DD Form 293.

The Kings County Veterans Service Office can complete the DMV Veteran Status Verification Form for the new California Veteran Designation on your driver's license.

We can also issue Veteran ID cards to honorably discharged veterans. Contact Joe Wright if you would like to receive periodic veteran's information by email. There are many state and federal benefits and programs available to veterans and their dependents.

To find out if you are eligible for any of these benefits, visit or call our office. We can and will assist you in completing all required application forms. You can get information on the Web from the Kings County Veterans Service Office webpage at www.countyofkings.com/vets.

Joe Wright, retired Navy Master Chief Petty Officer, is the Veterans Service Officer for Kings County. Send your questions to the Veterans Service Office, 1400 W. Lacey Blvd, Hanford, CA 93230; call (559)852-2669; or e-mail joe.wright@co.kings.ca.us.

Exeter Chamber of Commerce Honors Volunteers at 93rd Annual Banquet

Staff Reports

Exeter's Man and Woman of the Year, Heritage, Beautification and Business of the Year will be honored at the Exeter Chamber of Commerce 93rd Annual Banquet, Saturday, February 27, 2016.

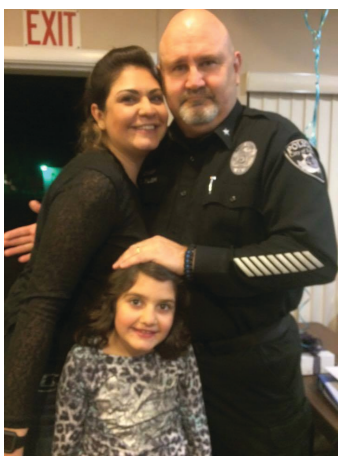
The honorees for the year 2015 are: Woman of the Year, Rose King and Man of the Year, Cliffton Bush. Heritage Award recipient is Pamela Whitmire.

The event honors those whose commitment, dedication and teamwork has made a positive impact on the people, quality of life and the business community of Exeter.

The 2015 Business of the Year is Exeter Hobbies and the Beautification Award recipient is El Carrusel Bakery.

Selection, in the case of the business, is made on community impact, developing a positive workforce and strong business principles. The beautification criteria are that a business constantly work toward beautification, pride in business and community, and by setting examples for others.

Rose King, Woman of the Year. Courtesy/Exeter Chamber



Cliff Bush, Man of the Year. Courtesy/Exeter Chamber

The purpose of the awards is to increase public awareness of the vital role business plays within the community and to bestow recognition on these businesses that have achieved excellence in their field.

Mid Valley Disposal is proud to announce their 5th Annual Recycler of the Year Award Lincoln Elementary School.

This award recognizes an organization, business, individual, school or recycling education program that fits the criteria and who contributes to the recycling efforts in the City of Exeter.

The Exeter Annual Banquet, will be Saturday, February 27, 6pm at the Exeter Veterans Memorial Building. Tickets are $40.00 each and are available at the Exeter Chamber of Commerce.

Brian Poochigian. Courtesy/Poochigian for Supervisor

Poochigian Enters Tulare County Supervisor Race for District 1

Staff Reports

After much discussion with his family and friends, Brian Poochigian is excited and proud to announce his candidacy for Tulare County Supervisor District 1.

He was born and raised in Tulare County, and graduated from Mt. Whitney High School. He received his Bachelor's degree from San Diego State University.

He is currently employed by Cal-Tex Transportation where he is entrusted with managing the logistics of the transportation of produce across the United States.

Brian Poochigian is married to Adrienne Skaff a teacher for Exeter Unified School District. The couple has one child.

Among Brian's priorities is the counties water crisis.

Once elected, Brian Poochigian promises to do whatever he can to make sure farmers and residents get the water they so desperately need. Agriculture is the life line to the Tulare County economy and we have to protect it.

The safety of Tulare County residents is another priority for Brian.

He plans on working with local law enforcement agencies to ensure they have all the network tools at their disposal to protect all Tulare County residents.

Brian Poochigian believes that Tulare County must have strong oversight on the budget. He supports identifying wasteful spending and will work on building the county monetary reserve. Government should be accountable for responsible spending.

"I promise to be a concerned and honest representative who will make a positive and significant impact on Tulare County to ensure it remains a great place to live and work for generations to come.'

For more information please visit poochigianfortcsupervisor.com

VALLEY VOICE
Valley Scene
18 February, 2016

Celtic and Healing Music Concert at Center for Spiritual Living

Donna Orozco

Keyboardist and tabla drum player Anton Mizerak and singer Laura Berryhill will present an evening of Celtic songs, transformational healing music and chants from around the world on Thursday, March 3 at 7 pm at the Center for Spiritual Living Visalia.

Laura Berryhill and Anton Mizerak

Mizerak has performed at events with Deepak Chopra. His highly acclaimed CD series When Angels Dream is a top seller with healers and massage therapists.

Berryhill records with the Trilogy Celtic Trio and is a member of Kitchen Celidh, an Oregon-based group which performs Scottish Gaelic songs.

The two have toured together in over 450 venues throughout the Western states. They also play summer concerts for spiritual tour groups at their performance venue on the side of Mt. Shasta.

The Center for Spiritual Living Visalia is located at 117 S. Locust St. (one block south of Main).

Tickets are $15. For more information, call the center at 559 625-2441 or go to www.cslvisalia.org.

"Jazz" by Richard Garoogian

Garoogian Demonstrates Music, Art at Center for Spiritual Living

Donna Orozco

Richard Garoogian is a well-known musician in town, playing with the band Zzah and leading a jazz get-together every Saturday morning at Café 210. But he is also an artist and photographer.

He will demonstrate both his talents during the First Friday Art Walk on Friday, March 4 from 6-8 pm at the Brandon-Mitchell Gallery located in the Center for Spiritual Living Visalia.

During the reception, he will play the piano and demonstrate some of his more unusual instruments, including the zharp, a synthesizer that he invented.

His art show will include a series of photographs he calls "Jazz."

"I like to bring the viewer into a different perspective," Garoogian said. "You might see the picture, but not from that angle."

He also likes to design his music to fit the art.

"When I played at the Tulare Historical Museum, I looked at the art to decide on the music. Jazz is spur of the moment," he said.

The show will run through the end of April at the center, 117 S. Locust (one block south of Main). The show is open during First Friday art walks and Monday-Thursday from 9:30am -3:30pm by ringing the bell at the door.

For more information, call(559) 625-2441 or visitwww.cslvisalia.org.

Frank Fritz, Mike Wolfe, and their show American Pickers will be returning to California. Courtesy/American Pickers

American Pickers to Return

Staff Reports

Mike Wolfe, Frank Fritz, and their team are excited to return to California! They plan to film episodes of the hit series American Pickers throughout California with filming scheduled for March 2016.

American Pickers is a documentary series that explores the fascinating world of antique 'picking' on History. The hit show follows Mike Wolfe and Frank Fritz, two of the most skilled pickers in the business, as they hunt for America's most valuable antiques--from motorcycles, classic cars and bicycles, to one-of-a-kind vintage memorabilia.

As they hit the back roads from coast to coast, Mike and Frank continue their mission to recycle America by rescuing forgotten relics and giving them a new lease on life, while learning a thing or two about American history along the way.

American Pickers is looking for leads and would love to explore your buried treasure. They are on the hunt for characters with interesting and unique items. Some of what they look for includesvintage bicycles, toys, unusual radios, movie memorabilia, advertising, military items, folk art, pre-50's western gear, early firefighting equipment, vintage musical equipment, automotive items and clothing. They are always excited to find things they've never seen before and learn the story behind it.

If someone has a large, private collection send in information: name, phone number, location and description of the collection with photos to americanpickers@cineflix.com, or call,(855)old-rust.

Planetarium Offers Four Shows

Staff Reports

During the months of February and March, the Sam B. Peña Planetarium, operated by the Tulare County Office of Education, will offer visitors a choice of two evening shows and two matinee shows, ideal for younger audiences.

Friday, February 19, 7pm – Black Holes: The Other Side of Infinity

Experience the creation of the Milky Way Galaxy, and witness the violent death of a star and subsequent birth of a black hole. Mathematical equations, cutting-edge science, and Einstein's theories fill in holes along the way.

The Pena Planetarium is located at 11535 Avenue 264 in Visalia. Courtesy/TCOE

Friday, March 11, 7pm – Wildest Weather in the Solar System

Join us on a spectacular journey to witness the most beautiful, powerful, and mysterious weather phenomena in the solar system. From a storm the size of a 100-megaton hydrogen bomb to a 400-year-old hurricane to a dust tempest that could engulf entire planets, you'll be glad you live on Earth.

Wednesday, March 23, 1:30pm – Perfect Little Planet

Discover our solar system through a new set of eyes - a family from another star system seeking the perfect vacation spot. Fly over the surface of Pluto, dive over the ice cliffs of Miranda, sail through the rings of Saturn, feel the lightning storms at Jupiter, and walk on the surface of Mars. This is the solar system journey for space travelers of all ages.

Wednesday, March 23, 3pm – Two Small Pieces of Glass: The Amazing Telescope

See how telescopes work and how the largest observatories in the world use these instruments to explore the mysteries of the universe.

For information, call (559) 737-6334 or visit www.tcoe.org/planetarium.

Tachi Palace Raises $3,900 for Navy Marine Corps Relief Society

Staff Reports

Tachi Palace Hotel and Casino hosted a community breakfast in December, benefiting the Navy Marine Corps Relief Society at NAS Lemoore. Approximately 375 members of the local community gathered to support this great cause which will provide direct financial assistance to local military service members and their families.

A total of $1,950 was raised at the door, and Tachi Palace was pleased to match that amount for a combined total of $3,900. Tachi General Manager Willie Barios then rounded the donation up even higher for a grand total of $4,000. Captain Monty Ashliman, commanding officer at NAS Lemoore, was in attendance and happily accepted the check on behalf of the many local service members it will benefit.

The Navy Marine Corps Relief Society provides financial assistance and education to members of the United States Navy and Marine Corps, their eligible family members, widows and survivors. Its main goal is to help each person seeking support for immediate needs. Its long-term mission is to help sailors and Marines become financially self-sufficient by learning how to better manage their personal finances and prepare for unplanned expenses.

Next month's breakfast will benefit the Lemoore Naval Aviator Memorial Association. The Tachi Palace community breakfast is a monthly event which features a full breakfast buffet, informative community news and business networking, as well as raffle prizes and the opportunity to mingle with old friends and make new ones. A $5 contribution is requested at the door which is donated to the organization chosen for the given month.

Swedish TV Show Searching for Americans with Swedish Ancestors

Staff Reports

Meter Television is searching for Americans of Swedish descent to participate in one of the most popular and nominated shows, "ALLTFÖRSVERIGE" (All for Sweden). 2 million Swedes (of a population of 9 millions) watched the season finale of season 5 in December 2015. Now the casting of season 6 has started.

Americans, accepted as participants, will travel to Sweden on an adventurous journey, learn about the culture and find out about their family who left for the USA. It's all a part of a challenge with a spectacular prize: a family reunion with their lost Swedish relatives!

Those interested can apply at greatswedishadventure.com.

HHSA
tchhsa.org

County Health Officer Urges Travelers to Take Precautions Against Zika Virus

Staff Reports

Tulare County Health Officer Dr. Karen Haught urges community members who are traveling to Mexico, and Central and South American countries to take precautions against mosquito bites to prevent contracting the Zika virus. Pregnant women and women considering becoming pregnant are encouraged not to travel at this time to countries where the Zika virus is widespread.

"It is important for community members to consider the implications of traveling to countries where the Zika virus is spreading rapidly and they could contract the disease," said Haught. "All community members, especially pregnant women if they have to travel, should take precautions against mosquito bites by using insect repellant and removing standing water where mosquitoes typically breed."

Because the Zika virus in pregnant women can cause microcephaly in the infant, pregnant women should take extra precautions. Additionally, the virus has been associated with miscarriages and fetal loss.

Although there is no evidence that the Aedesaegypti mosquitoes present in Tulare County carry the Zika virus, travelers may become infected and inadvertently spread the virus, which can be passed through blood transfusions and sexual contact. The best form of prevention is protection against getting mosquito bites.

If community members travel, they should protect themselves by:

- Using mosquito repellent which is safe for anyone over two months of age;
- Protecting skin from exposure to mosquitoes by wearing hats, long sleeved shirts, and pants;
- Using insecticide-treated mosquito nets for sleeping; and
- Staying in screened-in or air conditioned areas.

Information for pregnant women and women who may become pregnant:

- Before traveling to other countries, check the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website (http://www.cdc.gov/) for the most current information about areas included in the travel advisory and postpone travel to risky areas. Some airlines are allowing women to cancel or postpone flights to Zika affected areas. Contact your travel provider directly for more information.
- Using EPA approved insect repellent according to the product label is safe and effective for pregnant and nursing women. You can find more information about these products at http://www.epa.gov/insect-repellents/find-insect-repellent-right-you.

What's Happening at
TACHI PALACE HOTEL & CASINO

REO SPEEDWAGON
THURSDAY, MARCH 31ST
Doors Open at 6PM • Showtime at 7:30PM
Located in the Bingo Hall
Ticket Prices - $40, $50, $80

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Education

EM Tharp "We Believe in Growing" Scholarship Winners Announced

Staff Reports

World Ag Expo and EM Tharp, Inc. have teamed up for the 10th year to provide the "We Believe in Growing" scholarship which supports local high school students who will be attending four-year universities to major in an agricultural field. This year's winners, Wade Sousa and Madalyn Vieira, will each receive $2,500 scholarships to be renewed up to four years, totaling $10,000 per student.

Madalyn Vieira won the "We Belive in Growing" scholarship. Courtesy/Madalyn Vieira

"The future of ag is bright when placed in the hands of our best students," said Casey Tharp, vice president of EM Tharp. "We're happy to once again partner with World Ag Expo to make opportunities available to students who are pursuing their lifelong dreams and passions in agriculture."

Madalyn Vieira, a student at Tulare Western High School, plans to study Dairy Science at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo this coming fall. She has participated in numerous FFA activities, works in a retail creamery, is the reigning District 9 Tulare County Dairy Princess and will graduate at the top of her class as the 2016 Valedictorian.

"I want to make a mark for women in agriculture," said Vieira. "I want to prove that we are talented, educated and brilliant in our respective areas."

Wade Sousa, a student at Tulare Union High School, plans to study agriculture business and crop science at Colorado State University. He is a four-year FFA member, a five-year 4-H member, and works long hours on his family dairy farm and as a relief feeder at Casa Blanca Cattle Company.

"I have been actively engaged in the agriculture industry since day one," said Sousa. "I look forward to the new experiences that college will give me and what the future of the dairy business has in store for me."

To be considered for the scholarship, students from across the Central Valley submitted letters of recommendation, high school transcripts, ACT or SAT scores and must expect to graduate from high school during the 2015-2016 school year.

West Hills College Coalinga to Celebrate Black History Month with Feb. 22 Event

Staff Reports

West Hills College Coalinga will host an event celebrating Black History Month on Monday, February 22 at 6:30pm in the WHCC theater, organized by the WHCC Associated Student Body.

It will feature two guest speakers: Maurice Arrington, who is a lecturer in the Department of Kinesiology at California State University Northridge, and Justin Peppars of the West Hills Community College District IT department.

"Black History Month, also known as African-American History Month, is observed annually, not only in America, but in Canada and the United Kingdom as well," said Mark Gritton, WHCC Associate Dean of Student Services. "Over the years, West Hills College Coalinga ASB has participated in organizing an event to celebrate in remembrance of important people and occurrences in the history of the African movement."

Admission to the Black History Month celebration is free.

WHCC food services will also offer a special soul food dinner the same day, featuring catfish, Hoppin' Johns (a dish made with peas and rice), hush puppies and collard greens with buttermilk biscuits. Dinner will be available to the public in the WHCC Café from 4:30pm to 6pm for $9 per person and will include salad bar and a drink. To-go orders will also be available.

Orders in advance of the event can be placed by phone at (559) 934-2365 for pick up on the evening of the event or purchased at the Café register on the day of.

For more information about the event, contact Mark Gritton at 559-934-2455

West Hills College Lemoore Pass Rates for Nursing Licensure Exam Continue to Grow

Each year students from West Hills College Lemoore's nursing program take the National Council Licensure Exam, which enables them to obtain their Registered Nursing license, and this year the percentage of students who passed that exam has increased by 10%.

For 2014-2015, WHCL had a 95.12% pass rate compared to 85.19% for 2013-2014 and was one of only 21 schools out of 145 this year with a pass rate of 95% or better.

"Our students' success is a testament to their hard work in preparing for their exams," said Dr. Kristin Clark, WHCL President. "We are very proud of them. Their success is most certainly validation that our tremendous nursing faculty are committed and dedicated to student success."

More information about the test and pass rates is available at http://www.rn.ca.gov/schools/passrates.shtml.

Great Conversations

Trapped Inside: The Case of "Boys and Girls"

Joseph R. Teller

"You throw like a *girl!*" "*Girls* don't play like that." "Stop crying—men don't cry!" "That's not very lady-like."

At some point in our lives, we have all heard statements like this. What does it mean to be a boy or girl, or a man or woman? Do the genders have inherent characteristics? Is gender purely a social construct, something artificially imposed upon something far more fluid and unstable?

These questions dominate our public discourse—one need look no further than debates over women in the US armed forces or the rights of transgendered individuals to see how. They are also the questions explored by Alice Munro in her short story, "Boys and Girls," discussed at COS's Great Books meeting this past week.

Alice Munro

This coming-of-age story is narrated by a woman who looks back on a period of her life as an 11-year-old girl growing up in the Canadian town of Jubilee, where her family farmed foxes. As a girl, the narrator struggles to make sense of her relationship with her mother and her father. On the one hand, she prefers the company of her father, feeling pride in hard outdoor work. On the other hand, she is routinely berated by her mother—and others—for not behaving more like a girl should, as domestic help: "Wait till Laird [the narrator's brother] gets bigger, then you'll have real help," her mother says to the father; "It's not like I had a girl in the family at all."

The narrator's shame and her struggle to understand what being a girl means come to a crisis when the family obtains two old horses, Mack and Flora, who will be shot and turned into food for the foxes. The narrator and her brother secretly witness the shooting of Mack, a moment of adult initiation for them both. But when it is Flora's turn to die, and the spunky horse breaks away to escape, the narrator is faced with a climactic decision. Flora bounds for the open gate of the family's field, and the father shouts for the narrator to shut the gate. Yet the narrator does something profoundly symbolic: "Instead of shutting the gate, I opened it as wide as I could. I did not make the decision to do this, it was just what I did," she says.

Only her brother, Laird, sees this happen. Although Flora temporarily escapes, the narrator realizes the horse will die anyway—her father and brother pursue the horse in their truck. Sure enough, later that evening, the men return, covered in blood, with Flora "cut…up in fifty pieces. "At the dinner table, Laird tells the family that his sister opened the gate. She cries at the table, and the father pronounces, as if to dismiss the incident, "Never mind…she's only a girl."

Was the narrator's decision to free the horse a moment of triumph, or of tragedy? On the one hand, in defying her father and freeing Flora, the narrator triumphs over the domestic system that threatens to trap her: the horse is free, outside the boundaries of the property rather than confined inside (like the narrator's mother). But on the other hand, the attempt is futile from its inception, and it marks a dark turning point for the narrator: whereas at the beginning of the story, she used to sing songs at night and dream of rescuing people from danger, after this fateful decision and defeat, she stops singing—and in her dreams she becomes the victim rather than the rescuer.

Despite this tragic interpretation, our group also noted the story's final line, and its potential for hope: "I didn't protest [being called a girl], even in my heart. Maybe it was true." *Maybe*. But "maybe" can also be "maybe *not.*" Yes, societies can confine individuals with narrowly prescribe gender roles—and maybe we don't have to fulfill them.

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Calendar

Mondays: Bridge Club, 9:30am-2pm
210 W Center Street Visalia, CA 93291**.** Admission is free. For additional information call: Joan Dinwiddie @ 732-0855

Mondays: Knitters, 10am-12:30pm
210 W Center Street Visalia, CA 93291**.** Everyone is welcome.

Fridays: Women's Morning Bible Study, 9am-Noon
210 W Center Street Visalia, CA 93291. For additional information call: 739-9010

Saturdays: Cup of Jazz, 10am-Noon
At Cafe 210, at 210 Center street, Visalia. Free. Led by Richard Garoogian. Call 559.730.0910 for more information.

2nd Tuesday, Monthly: Yappy Hour, 5-9pm
Well-mannered, leashed pets are welcome on the patio at the Planing Mill Artisan Pizzeria, 514 East Main Street, Suite A, in Visalia. A portion of the proceeds is donated to the Valley Oak SPCA. For more information, call 651-1111.

1st Wednesday, Monthly through June 8: South Valley Guitar Society Meeting, 7-8:30pm
All acoustic musicians and music lovers are welcome to join at 1849 E. Tulare Rd. in Lindsay. The more styles of music, the better. A featured performer each month during the first half of the meeting. During the second, anyone is welcome to play. Share a song or simply enjoy the music. Bring snack to share. Every first Wednesday of the month through June 8. For more information, call **559-303-3943.**

1st Thursday, Monthly: Veterans Support Group, 5:30-7pm
Free support group for global war on terrorism & post 9-11 (Veterans Only) at the Tulare Public Library, 475 North M Street in Tulare. Facilitated by: Dr. Lance Zimmerman, Ph.D of veterans Counseling Clinic. "The transition from serving in a combat zone to civilian life can be a difficult one. Combat veterans commonly experience feelings of depression, isolation, alienation, guilt, anxiety, and anger following their service. If you're experiencing these or any other emotional problems after serving in a combat zone, it's vital to seek professional help. " -Veterans Counseling Clinic

3rd Thursday, Monthly: Gathering At the Oval, 12:30-1pm
Lifting up the needs and concerns of Visalia through individual prayer and meditation at Oval Park, 808 North Court Street in Visalia. For more information, call 967-4065.

3rd Thursday, Monthly: Board Game Night, 6-7:45pm
For ages 10+ at the Visalia Branch Library, 200 West Oak Street. Sign-ups are not required. For more information, call 713-2703.

3rd Thursday, Monthly: Ladies' Night, 6-10pm
At the Clay Cafe in Visalia, 1018 E. Mineral King Ave. $10 studio fee with ceramic purchase. Includes complimentary margarita, dinner and dessert. Door prizes too! Reservations required: 733-2022

1st and 3rd Thursdays: Central Valley Tea Party Meetings, 6pm
819 West Visalia Road, Farmersville.

February 10th – March 16th (Every Wednesday for 6 weeks 10am-12:30pm)
April 5th – May 10th (Every Tuesday for 6 weeks 10am -12:30pm)
July 12th – August 16th (Every Tuesday for 6 weeks 10am – 12:30pm)
October 4th – November 8th (Every Tuesday for 6 weeks 10am – 12:30pm)
If you would like to learn how to better manage your health, sign up for a free six-week workshop presented by Kaweah Delta Health Care District. The workshop is designed to help people with ongoing health problems such as diabetes, arthritis, heart disease, asthma, or any other chronic condition. Class size is typically around 12-18 participants. Each session lasts 2 ½ hours. Topics that are covered include: dealing with difficult emotions, managing symptoms, goal setting, problem solving, nutrition, understanding medications, making informed treatment decisions, and increasing strength and stamina through better fitness. This workshop was developed by Dr. Kate Lorig at Stanford University. Participants demonstrate significant improvements in the areas covered. They also report fewer hospitalizations and outpatient visits. The Empowerment for Better Living CDSMP workshops will be offered on a quarterly basis at the newly opened Chronic Disease Management Center located at 325 Willis Street in Visalia.

March 5, 12, 18, 19: EMT Refresher Courses, 8:30am-5pm
Room: HC 2021, Porterville College. Instructor: Mr. Manny Santoyo, EMT-P. Four-Day Refresher Course - $185.00. This includes 3 days of didactic skills (24 hours) and 1 day of skills. Three-Day Refresher Course (skills not included) – $110.00.Two-Day Refresher Course (16 hours) – $80.00.

One-Day Refresher Course (8 hours) – $50.00. Skills Day ONLY – $80.00.

FEBRUARY

February 19: Black Holes: The Other Side of Infinity, 7pm
Experience the creation of the Milky Way Galaxy, and witness the violent death of a star and subsequent birth of a black hole. Mathematical equations, cutting-edge science, and Einstein's theories fill in holes along the way. At the Peña Planetarium in the Tulare County Office of Education Planetarium & Science Center, 11535 Avenue 264, Visalia. Tickets are available at the Planetarium office only after 5pm on the day of the evening show and only after 12pm on the day of the matinees. Tickets are $4 for adults and $3 for children 11 and under. Visitors may choose to see one or both matinees listed on the schedule. However, each show requires the purchase of a separate ticket. Children must be accompanied by an adult. No late seating is offered once the planetarium doors close. For information, call (559) 737-6334.

February 19: Crab Cioppino Feed, 7-9pm
TDES Holy Spirit Festa Presents an all you can eat Crab Cioppino Feed featuring: Salad, Pasta, Cioppino & Wine. Dine-in only at TDES Hall 515 N. "I" Street in Tulare. Tickets are $40 per person. Proceeds to benefit the 2016 TDES Holy Spirit Festa. For tickets or information call (559) 679-9072, (562) 544-4788 or (559)358-1052.

February 20: Veterans Resource Center 1-Year Anniversary & Dedication, 12-1pm
Join us at Tulare Public Library, 475 North M. Street in Tulare, to celebrate our 1-Year Anniversary of our Veterans Resource Center and Dedication to Elvis Garcia Gonzalez (March 6, 1985 - August 8, 2015), a U.S. Army Combat Veteran during Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) who served with distinction and helped establish VA Work-Study at TPL before his tragic death. Hosted by City Council Member and U.S. Military Mom, Shea Gowin, and distinguished guests Assembly Member Devon Mathis; Mayor David Macedo; Vice Mayor Carlton Jones; Rudy Mendoza speaking for Congressman Devin Nunes; and, of course, the Garcia-Gonzalez family who will receive an honorary plaque. A permanent plaque will be unveiled by Mayor Macedo. Thank you to all our guests, Tulare Community Band, the Central Valley Vietnam Veterans, and Employment Development Department for participating in this event. Once again, the resource center was made possible by "Veterans Connect @ the Library," an LSTA grant and partnership with CALVet. For more information, call Sara Brown at 559-685-4500.

February 20: Porterville College Foundation Hall of Fame Induction Banquet, 6pm
Porterville College is proud to announce the inductees for the sixth annual Porterville College Foundation Hall of Fame Induction Banquet in the Porterville College Student Center, on the Porterville College campus, 100 East College Avenue in Porterville. The 2016 Distinguished Alumni is Joe Ruiz. The 2016 Athletic Hall of Fame inductees are the 2004-05 Porterville College Women's Basketball Team. Congratulations to all inductees and their families. The Alumni Hall of Fame award recognizes former Porterville College students who have made outstanding contributions to both their professions and their communities; these alumni embody the highest standards of excellence. Induction into the Alumni Hall of Fame is the highest honor given to alumni by the Porterville College Foundation. Tickets are $25 each, $130 for a table of six, and $175 for a table of eight. Seating is limited and will sell out fast. Get your tickets today by calling the Foundation Office at (559) 791-2319, from any PC Foundation Board member, or by calling (559) 784-5300.

February 20: Tulare County Symphony presents Great Movies/Great Music: Escapes and Escapades, Doors: 6:30pm/Show: 7:30pm
Great Movies/Great Music: Escapes and Escapades, featuring the music of John Williams, Hans Zimmer and Danny Elfman. This popular series returns with music from the great adventure films, showcasing music from some of today's (and yesterday's) most popular and exciting composers. The music of John Williams takes center stage, joined by two other Rock Star composers and Hollywood heavy-weights, Hans Zimmer and Danny Elfman.

February 20: A Night of... Wine, Cheese, & Chocolate, 6:30-8pm
Are you still thinking of what to give your sweetheart for Valentine's Day? Surprise him or her with an ele-gant evening out, sampling a wide va-riety of fine wines, cheeses, and choc-olates. On Saturday, February 20th, Tulare Historical Museum's ever growing and popular "A Night of...Wine, Cheese, & Choco-late!" is back by popular demand. The event takes place under the backdrop of the Museum's Historical and Art Galleries. Tickets are $35 per person, and can be purchased either by calling the Mu-seum, online at www.tularehistorical museum.org , or by speaking with any of our Board Trustees. Tickets are limited for this event, so be sure to purchase them soon.

February 21: 25th Anniversary Luncheon for Portuguese Language Television, 12-1pm

Come to TDES Portugueses Hall, On the corner of Cross Avenue and I Street in Tulare, and celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Portuguese language television program Os Portugueses no Vale, broadcast twice weekly on KNXT-Channel 49. All profits from this luncheon will benefit KNXT-Channel 49. For 25 years we have been promoting the Portuguese-American experience in the San Joaquin Valley with this weekly television program. We hope to see you there. Tickets are available through February the 12th. No tickets at the door. For tickets and more information contact: D.Borges@COMCAST.NET 559-260-2871

February 21: Wine & Dine, a Fundraising Dinner in Support of Habitat For Humanity, 5pm
Chef Karl Merten, owner of Cafe 225,

hosts a dinner where wine will be paired with each course for the maximum flavor experience. At Cafe 225, 225 West Main Street in Visalia. Tickets are $60 each. For more information, call Deanna at 734-4040.

February 23: Keep Calm And Knit And Crochet On, 3-4pm
Want to relieve stress, make new friends, and create beautiful, useful items all at the same time? Come to the Knitting and Crocheting Social sponsored by the Friends of the Library-Exeter. Hosted by Friends President Sandy Marlow, needle craft lovers are invited to bring their current projects, and newbies are introduced to new ways to make the needles move! Sandy will bring her projects to demonstrate stitches and techniques. The social is free, light refreshments will be served, and everyone is welcome. The Exeter Branch of the Tulare County Library is located at 230 East Chestnut Street in Exeter. The Friends of the Library-Exeter is an association for people who love libraries, reading, books, volunteering, and raising money to enhance public library services in Exeter. For more information about the social or the Friends, please call (559)592-5361.

February 23: Spay-ghetti Dinner Fundraiser for Valley Oak SPCA Spay and Neuter Fund, 4-8pm
Your $10 ticket includes a quart of Rosa's spaghetti with house Marinara sauce and garlic cheese bread. Bring your ticket on Tuesday, February 23 to Rosa's Italian Restaurant (314 S. Johnson Street, Visalia) between 4pm and 8pm to pick up your take-out dinner. Purchase your ticket by Monday, February 22 at:

* Valley Oak SPCA Adoption Center, 29010 Highway 99, Visalia

* Valley Oak SPCA Low Cost Spay and Neuter Clinic, 9405 W. Goshen Ave, Visalia

* GW Stewart's Salon and Gift Emporium, 430 S. Church, Visalia

Call 651-1111 ext 6 for event information or to charge tickets by phone. Valley Oak SPCA makes $5 from each take-out dinner from this event for our Spay and Neuter Fund.

February 23: Exercise & You Lecture Series at The Lifestyle Center, 6-7pm
The Lifestyle Center (TLC) invites the community to attend FREE informative lecture series presented by TLC Exercise Physiology Staff. Lectures are from 6:00pm to 7:00pm at TLC conference room located 5105 W. Cypress Ave in Visalia. Please review the following dates and topics and join us. Tonight: Cardiovascular Exercise, presented by: Feliz Santillan, BS

February 25: Central Valley Technology Expo & Conference, 8:30am-3:30pm
Tulare County Information and Communications Technology (TCiCT) is pleased to announce our 5th Annual Central Valley Technology Expo and Conference (CVTEC). This is a public event scheduled for the Visalia Convention Center, 303 E. Acequia in Visalia. There is no cost to attend.

February 25: Bingo For Books At Exeter Branch Library, 2:30-5:30pm
BINGO! The Exeter Branch Library invites children 3-18 to play bingo for a chance to win a book and other prizes. Drop in and play a game on Thursday, February 25. The Friends of the Library-Exeter donated all these wonderful prizes. The Exeter Branch Library is located on 230 E Chestnut in Exeter. For more information, please contact 559-592-5361.The Exeter library is a branch of the Tulare County Library which serves all the citizens of Tulare County with locations in fifteen communities, four book machines, and an online presence at www.tularecountylibrary.org.

February 25: J.E.C. Offering Free, Public Workshop, 3-4pm
The Porterville College Job, Entrepreneur, and Career (J.E.C.) Center invites the public to attend their free, career and wellness development workshops being held at Porterville College, 100 East College Avenue in Porterville off Highway 190 in Porterville. Today: "Student Wellness," provided by Student Services in LIB-449. Learn the basics of student wellness to ensure student success. For more information call (559) 791-2216 or visit www.portervillecollege.edu. Find the Porterville College J.E.C. on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

February 25: Brian Regan, 7:30pm
A night of comedy at the Visalia Fox Theatre. Tickets $30, $35, $40, $45.

February 27: Rare Plant Treasure Hunt on Lewis Hill Preserve, 10am-1pm
Field Trip Leader: Fletcher Linton, Sequoia National Forest Botanist. The open grasslands and blue oak woodlands of the southern Sierra Nevada foothills provide critical habitat for many native plants, along with two exceptional rare wildflowers at Lewis Hill Preserve. In 1994, the Hawkins family donated this property north of Porterville to the Kern River Research Center. Six years later, the title transferred to the Tule Oaks Land Trust, which later merged with Sequoia Riverlands Trust. Enjoy the rare opportunity to visit this property which is mostly an annual grassland with many varieties of wildflowers that are blooming this time of year including golden stars (Triteleia ixiodes), and Ithuriel's spear (Triteleia laxa) and two rare plants, the exquisite and fragrant striped adobe lily (Fritillaria striata) and the San Joaquin adobe sunburst (Pseudobahia piersonii). Both of these rare species are very difficult to find anywhere else in Tulare County. On the way up the hill we will put markers down where we find these elusive flowers. Alta Peak Chapter Rare Plant Team leaders, Ann Huber and Mary Merriman, will be on hand to assist in documenting the sighting of these rare plants on the CNPS Rare Plant Treasure Hunt survey forms to be turned into the State Office of CNPS. The walk is moderate in difficulty due to the rocky ground and steep hill (700 ft), but only about one mile round trip. Bring water, snacks, sun hat and sunscreen as needed. CNPS field trips are free and open to the public. Directions: Going South on Highway 65 (towards Porterville), turn left at the Strathmore exit. Travel east several miles and turn right (south) at Avenue 256. Lewis Hill is near the top of the grade on the right. Park along side of the road.For more information contact Ann Huber at 559-561-4562

February 27: Johnny Rivers, 7:30pm
At the Visalia Fox Theatre. Tickets $25-$70, benefitting Hands in the Community.

February 29: A *Leap Forward* for Farmersville – Ground Breaking Ceremony for New Sports Park Complex, Noon-1pm
Join the City of Farmersville as we take a Leap Forward with a ground breaking ceremony for the new Sports Park Complex in Farmersville. This 18+ acre multi-purpose, master-planned park and urban green space will be transformational in improving the quality of life and recreational opportunities for Farmersville's youth, residents and visitors and we want you to join in our celebration t the east side (Freedom Drive) of Veterans Park, 1334 North Farmersville Blvd. East side (Freedom Drive) of Veterans Park, 1334 North Farmersville Blvd. Attendees are encouraged to enter from the north at East Walnut and Freedom Drive, look for the green balloons and don't forget to wear comfortable shoes. Confirm your attendance or RSVP to: The City of Farmersville, Attn: Patricia Button, City Clerk at pbutton@cityoffarmersville-ca.gov or by calling 559-747-0458. www.cityoffarmersville-ca.gov

February 29: Lindsay Chamber of Commerce Baked Potatoes Sale, 3-7pm
This sale will occur four days before our first Friday Night Market. Come and have a taste of what Friday Night Market brings you every Friday. Get your tickets at the Lindsay Chamber of Commerce. Tickets are $6 including your drink. This sale will take place at the Lindsay Sweet Briar Plaza, from 3-7pm. Stop by before heading home from work and help us raise funds for our upcoming events.

February 29: CASA of Tulare County Community Mixer "We are for the Child," 5:30-7:30pm
CASA of Tulare County Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children invites you to the CASA Community Mixer. Come learn about the options for making a difference in the lives of our most vulnerable children, at 210 Cafe at 210 West Center Street in Visalia. Meet current CASA Advocates who can answer your questions. CASA is central to fulfilling society's most fundamental obligation by ensuring a qualified, compassionate adult will fight for and protect a child's right to be safe, to be treated with dignity and respect, to learn and to grow in the safe embrace of a loving family. Appetizers & coffee provided. Open to Community members 21 and over. There will be door prizes and raffles. Win an iPad 2 mini and lots of other great prizes! For more information call: (559)625-4007 or go to :www.CASATulareCo.org.

MARCH

March 1: 7th Annual Empty Bowls, 5:30-7:30pm
At the VRM Community Center.

March 3: Celtic music and chants from around the world, 7pm
Mount Shasta keyboardist, harmonica and tabla player Anton Mizerak and singer Laura Berryhill will present an evening of Celtic songs,transformational healing music and chants from around the world at 7 p.m. at the Center for Spiritual Living, 117S. Locust Street, Visalia. Tickets $15.559 625-2441 or www.cslvisalia.org.

March 5: Tulare County CROP Hunger Walk, 8am
Registration begins at 8am and the walk at 9am from St. Paul's Anglican Church. Please join this community wide walk to raise awareness and money for worldwide and local hunger relief. Twenty-five percent of money raised will be donated to FoodLink of Tulare County.

Since the first walk in 1976, CROP walkers have raised over $400,000 in these efforts, with $100,000 remaining in Tulare County. The faces of the walkers have changed in 40 years but the spirit and purpose remain the same: to alleviate hunger throughout the world. For more information: contact Joy Marshall at 734-6477

March 5: 2nd Annual Charity Golf Tournament Benefitting the Barbara Saville Women's Shelter, 9am

A Shotgun start at the Lemoore Golf Course for this 4-person scramble. $100 per person/$400 per team includes green fees, cart rental and lunch. For more information call 415-7202.

Send your calendar items to: editor@ourvalleyvoice.com

Sports

Redwood Girls' Wrestlers Look To Compete in State Championships

Stefan Barros

The Redwood High School wrestling program has three female wrestlers who are qualifying in the hopes of getting to the 2016 CIF Girls' Wrestling Championships later this month at the Visalia Convention Center. The three girls--Elizabeth Lopez, Alondra Rivera and Maria Barilla--competed in the WYL championships over the weekend and in the Section championships this week.

Those tournaments are all leading up to the state championships February 27-28 at the Visalia Convention Center. The girls, right now, know what is waiting for them in the days to come, but they are mainly focused what is right here in front of them.

"I'm focused on both the League Championship and the State tournament. I'm nervous about it, but I'm still confident in myself," said Lopez.

Barilla wants to get to State in order to reach one of her goals, "I'd like to make it. We force ourselves to reach for the biggest goals."

Rivera just wants to keep it simple in her approach to these possible next few tournaments. "I want to stay in the moment," she said. "If I'm successful I will make it to state."

Barilla spoke about what it means to her to get this far. "It means a lot, especially since wrestling hasn't really been a women's sport, it's been more dominated by men. It just feels amazing."

The girls talked of what influenced them to get their start in the sport. "I started in the eighth grade when my mother encouraged me to do it. I thought it would be really fun to do," said Rivera.

Lopez also shared how she got her start in the sport of wrestling. "The coach at Green Acres {Middle School} wanted me to get into it. I thought it would be different, and I really started to like it."

The girls discussed what they will need to improve upon in order to reach the ultimate goal of the state championships. "I haven't been as strong or aggressive as I need to be. I expect more out of myself," said Lopez.

Barilla said motivation is something that may need to be worked on going in to these final tournaments. "We need to be pushing ourselves as a group. We can push just a little more."

On the other end of the spectrum, they talked about why they should be confident going into the League championships. "I feel like I'm experienced out there. There's nothing that's going to surprise me," Lopez said.

Barilla also talked about how the whole group should be feeling as they enter into these final tournaments. "We have determination. We're getting a lot of encouragement from our team mates and coaches. It helps us give a little extra effort."

With the girls only being a couple steps away from being in the state championships, they talked about whether or not it would be a failure if they failed to reach that point. "It wouldn't be a failure. I'm happy with what I've done and where we are as a group. I've worked hard to get here," Barilla said.

Lopez would look at it as a motivational tool if she was unable to reach the state finals. "I would be disappointed, but I would want to come back next year stronger than ever."

The girls also wanted to give credit to Head Coach David Watts and the rest of the coaching staff for helping them get to this point. "They really help with the mental side of it. Coaches can prepare you physically, but it's the mental side that helps the most, and they are always pushing us to keep going," said Barilla.

Lopez also commented on how much Watts has helped her get to this point. "He is a really good coach for us. He supports us all the way through each match."

If the Barilla, Lopez and Rivera each make it the through the West Yosemite League Championships, they will compete in the Section Championships on Thursday, February 18. From that point they would compete for the State Championships on February 27-28 at the Visalia Convention Center.

The Visalia Convention Center was chosen as the host site for State Championships out of a field of proposals submitted to CIF, according to Rebecca Brutlag of CIF public relations.

Youth Baseball Registration Open

Increase your child's health and wellness by keeping them physically active. Register for the Porterville Parks and Leisure Youth Baseball League. The league is designed for boys and girls ages 4-13 with a cost of $58. It welcomes all skill levels and develops fundamentals, character and sportsmanship. The goal is to foster a positive, pressure free environment. It's the perfect fit for your child to truly enjoy the sport and want to return the following season.

Register online through the City of Porterville website or at the Heritage Center, 256 E. Orange Ave. Registration will continue until all divisions are full. For more information, call (559) 791- 7695 or visit the City of Porterville website. Stay up to date on all services and programs by following Parks & Leisure on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

West Hills College Coalinga Expands Annual Century Cycling Event, Set for March 12

Staff Reports

West Hills College Coalinga's increasingly popular cycling event, formerly limited to a 62-mile Metric Century ride, has now been expanded to include a new 100-mile century route in addition to optional distances measuring approximately 62 miles, 38 miles and 10 miles.

All rides begin and end at the West Hills College Coalinga campus with participants riding through the Coalinga oil fields and hills and Los Gatos Creek Canyon to the San Benito County line and beyond. All of WHCC's proceeds from the event will go toward scholarships at West Hills College Coalinga.

"Funds that are raised will go toward helping students in their relentless pursuit of success through our President's Scholars program and our WHCC Good Samaritan fund," said WHCC President Dr. Carole Goldsmith.

In addition to the Century ride, there will also be a Metric Century, Mini-Metric and a fun ride. Included in the registration fee is an after ride meal, SAG support from the Fresno Cycling Club, rest stops and bike parking/storage.

The fun ride will be hosted by the WHCC Athletic Department with the support of the WHCC Associated Student Body. Included in the price of a fun ride registration is a free barbeque after the ride. Century, Metric Century and Mini-Metric riders will be offered a lunch in the college café, including tri-tip, chicken and a full salad bar. Century riders will also be offered a lunch once they reach Laguna Mountain Park.

The fun ride will begin at 10am, with the barbeque from noon to 2pm. Century riders will depart the college between 7am and 8am, Metric riders by 8:30am and Mini-Metric riders by 9am.

Online registration is now available and will continue until March 11 for the Century, Metric Century and Mini-Metric routes and until March 12 for the fun ride. Registration is $55 for the Century, $45 for the Metric Century, $35 for the Mini-Metric and $10 for the fun ride. Registration will also be available on campus on the day of the ride between 7 a.m. and 10 a.m. For more information and to register online, go to westhillscollege.com/century/.

Special gift bags will be given to the first 100 participants to register online for the Century, Metric Century or Mini-Metric routes, which will include one free ticket for an after ride drawing.

For ride specific questions, contact Al Graves by phone at (559) 934-2789 or (559) 284-0787 or email him at algraves@whccd.edu or anbgraves@msn.com.

WHCC Falcons Softball to Host Strike Out for Cancer Breast Cancer Awareness Game

West Hills College Coalinga Falcons Softball will host Chabot College in a double header on Sunday, February 21, while also raising money for a good cause.

All proceeds from the "Strike Out for Cancer" breast cancer awareness game will benefit Play4TheCure, an initiative by The National Foundation for Cancer Research (NFCR) dedicated to raising funds for the NFCR through competitive sports.

"We decided to host this event to take part in Play4The Cure and raise awareness for breast cancer," said Head Softball Coach Staci Mosher. "The NFCR is such a great organization that pairs with sports teams all over the country to work together to raise money. This is something that WHCC Softball wanted to be a part of."

Game times are noon and 2pm at the WHCC softball field. General admission is $5, $3 for senior citizens aged 50 and over, and free for students with a college ID card and children seven and under with adult supervision.

The team is also selling Strike Out for Cancer t-shirts leading up to the game.

For more information about the event or to purchase t-shirts, contact assistant coach Gabrielle Brixey at (559) 934-2457, or gabriellebrixey@whccd.edu.

Recycle this paper..
nap on a park bench.

Health

Kaweah Delta Recognized as Top 10% in Nation for General Surgery

Staff Reports

General Surgery at Kaweah Delta Medical Center is among the top 10% in the nation as measured by lowest risk-adjusted complications, according to this year's evaluation from Healthgrades, the leading online resource helping consumers make informed decisions in order to find the right doctor, the right hospital, and the right care.

Every year Healthgrades evaluates hospital performance at nearly 4,500 hospitals nationwide for 33 of the most common inpatient procedures and conditions.

The achievement is part of findings in the Healthgrades 2016 Report to the Nation. The new report demonstrates how clinical performance continues to differ dramatically between hospitals both nationally and regionally. This variation in care has a significant impact on health outcomes. For example, from 2012 through 2014, if all hospitals as a group, performed similarly to hospitals receiving 5 stars as a group, on average 222,392 lives could potentially have been saved and 166,086 complications could potentially have been avoided. A 5-star rating indicates that Kaweah Delta's clinical outcomes are statistically significantly better than expected when treating the condition or conducting the procedure being evaluated.

Kaweah Delta not only performs at a 5-star level in general surgery, it outperforms other hospitals in the nation in general surgery and as a result has been recognized with the 2016 Healthgrades General Surgery Excellence Award™.

The General Surgery Excellence Award™ recognizes hospitals for superior outcomes in bowel obstruction treatment, colorectal surgeries, gallbladder removal, esophageal/stomach surgeries, and small intestine surgeries. Patients who have these procedures at these nationally recognized hospitals have a lower risk of dying or experiencing a complication during their hospital stay.

For its analysis, Healthgrades evaluated approximately 40 million Medicare inpatient records for nearly 4,500 short-term acute care hospitals nationwide, and assessed hospital performance relative to each of 33 common conditions and procedures.

Healthgrades recognizes a hospital's quality achievements for cohort-specific performance, specialty area performance, and overall clinical quality. Individual procedure or condition cohorts are designated as 5 star (statistically significantly better than expected), 3 star (not statistically different from expected), and 1 star (statistically significantly worse than expected) categories. The complete Healthgrades 2016 Report to the Nation with detailed cohort-specific outcomes data, hospital-specific quality achievements, and detailed study methodology, can be found at www.healthgrades.com/quality.

Established in 1963, Kaweah Delta Health Care District is the only trauma center between Fresno and Bakersfield. Kaweah Delta Medical Center was recently recognized by Healthgrades as one of America's 100 Best™ 2016 hospitals for Spine Surgery as well as Excellence Awards in Orthopedic Surgery, Pulmonary Care, and General Surgery.

The district offers a comprehensive scope of services including everything from a well-respected pediatric hospitalist program to nationally recognized orthopedic and cancer programs. For more information, visit www.kaweahdelta.org or follow Kaweah Delta on Twitter and Facebook.

WHCCD Child Development Now Accepting Registrations for 2016 PIECE Conference

Staff Reports

The West Hills Community College District child development centers are accepting registrations for open seats at the 2016 annual PIECE Conference. The theme for Practicing Intervention Early for Childhood Educators (PIECE) this year is "Supporting the Hands of Our Future."

The conference will be held at the Tachi Palace Conference Center in Lemoore on Saturday, March 12. Early bird registration ends Friday, Feb. 5. The early bird fee is $40 per person. After Feb. 5, the cost is $50 per person. Registration fees include breakfast and lunch, which will be served during the conference. Registration and breakfast begin at 8am March 12, and the event will wrap up around 4pm.

"The purpose and objective of this conference is to bring early childhood educators together for networking possibilities, to gather strength and knowledge from each other, and make them feel their importance," said Conne Cleveland, CDC Program Director.

Workshop topics include meaningful communication, emotional literacy, dyslexia and early intervention, physical activity, seeing sounds, yoga for children, nutrition, professional growth and development and more.

The Keynote address will be delivered by Lupe Jaime of the Fresno County Office of Education.

"We hope attendees walk away with new information on the most up to date research, with new ideas for their classrooms, and feeling empowered and refreshed in a profession that is so important for our future," Cleveland said.

Collaborating supporters of the conference include Brandman University, California Preschool Instructional Network, UC Davis, Children's Services Network, United Cerebral Palsy of Central California, Hands4Learning and Kaplan.

Contact Cleveland at 559-934-2383 or connecleveland@whccd.edu for more information.

Porterville College to Offer EMT Refresher Courses in March

Staff Reports

Registration in now open for upcoming EMT Refresher courses at Porterville College. The courses will take place from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. March, 5, 12, 18 and 19 in HC 2021 at Porterville College. Prior registration is required.

The EMT Four Day Refresher course is designed for students who possess a current EMT-B card and who need to complete 24 hours of continuing education and sit for the competency-based written and skills certification examination in accordance with the standards of the California State and Health Code, Title 22. Students should possess a current EMT-B card. Students will receive a Certificate of Completion with 24 Continuing Education Units.

The EMT Refresher module courses (One, Two, Three Day courses or Skills Day) are designed for EMT-B students who need all or only a partial EMT refresher course. These review courses will provide the most up-to-date information in accordance with the standards of the California State and Health Code, Title 22. Students will receive eight continuing education units for each refresher course day attended, up to a maximum of 24 continuing education units. No continuing education units are provided for the testing day.

Cost is $185 for the Four-day Refresher course (this includes three days of didactic skills [24 hours] and one day of skills); $110 for the Three Day Refresher Course (skills not included); $80 for the Two Day Refresher course (16 hours); $50 for the One Day Refresher course (8 hours) and $80 for the Skills Day alone.

The textbook not required, but highly recommended: "Essentials of Emergency Care, A Refresher for the Practicing EMT-B", Third Edition. For more information call (559) 791-2220.

To register for classes, go to www.porterville.asapconnected.com or visit the PC website at www.portervillecollege.edu.

You can also register in person at the Porterville College Admissions and Records Office, 100 East College Avenue in Porterville.

For more information on Community Education please contact Sam Aunai at (559) 791-2308 or email communityed@portervillecollege.edu.

Kaweah Delta Combines Nuclear Medicine with CT Technology

Kaweah Delta is committed to bringing the latest in technology to the community. TwoSymbia™ T Series SPECT• CT cameras are now available to expand the role of nuclear medicine into routine surgical planning, orthopedics, advanced cardiology and much more. This newer technology enhances the image quality, and increases speed and efficiency.

"With the industry's highest NEMA sensitivity technologies, the Symbia T offers maximum scanning speed while providing low dose CT attenuation to produce the highest possible image quality available" shared Gordon Ah-Tye, director of Imaging & Radiation Services in Radiology Diagnostic at Kaweah Delta.

Prior to October of 2015, if someone visited the hospital for testing, they can contrast the dramatic change in the setup of the room and equipment. Onemay have had to waitin your wheelchair in the same room with two scanners in use with only a curtain as a barrier. As one waited their turn to be prepped and placed onto the scanner, behind were the technicians on computersmonitoring other patients. Fast forward into 2016 and the experience is completely different with each scanner in its own room with a control room wheretechnicians monitor patients. Whether someone is there for 6 minutes or an hour, the experience of privacy is much more apparent.

Previously, to position the scanners was labor intensive, which may differ for a range of services. Now, the experience is much different with automatic adjustment settings that are robotic.

"I call them my transformers because of the way the collimator separates to accommodate to the patient's comfort" said Carmen Navarrette, nuclear medicine technician at Kaweah Delta. "But they really are transforming the experience patients are having. We have critical patients in a painful state, and feel that they can't handle being scanned. When they learn they don't have to get up or move, they are very happy."

For more information on other outpatient radiology services offered by Nuclear Medicine, call (559) 624-2350. Nuclear Medicine is located on the first floor of the Acequia Wing of Kaweah Delta Medical Center.

Tulare Hospital Foundation to Host Murder Mystery Gala

Staff Reports

The Tulare Hospital Foundation and its Board of Trustees is proud to announce the first inaugural "An Evening With the Great Gatsby" Murder Mystery Gala, which is to be held Saturday, March 26, at the Tulare Veteran's memorial Building, 1771 E. Tulare Ave. – Tulare, CA.

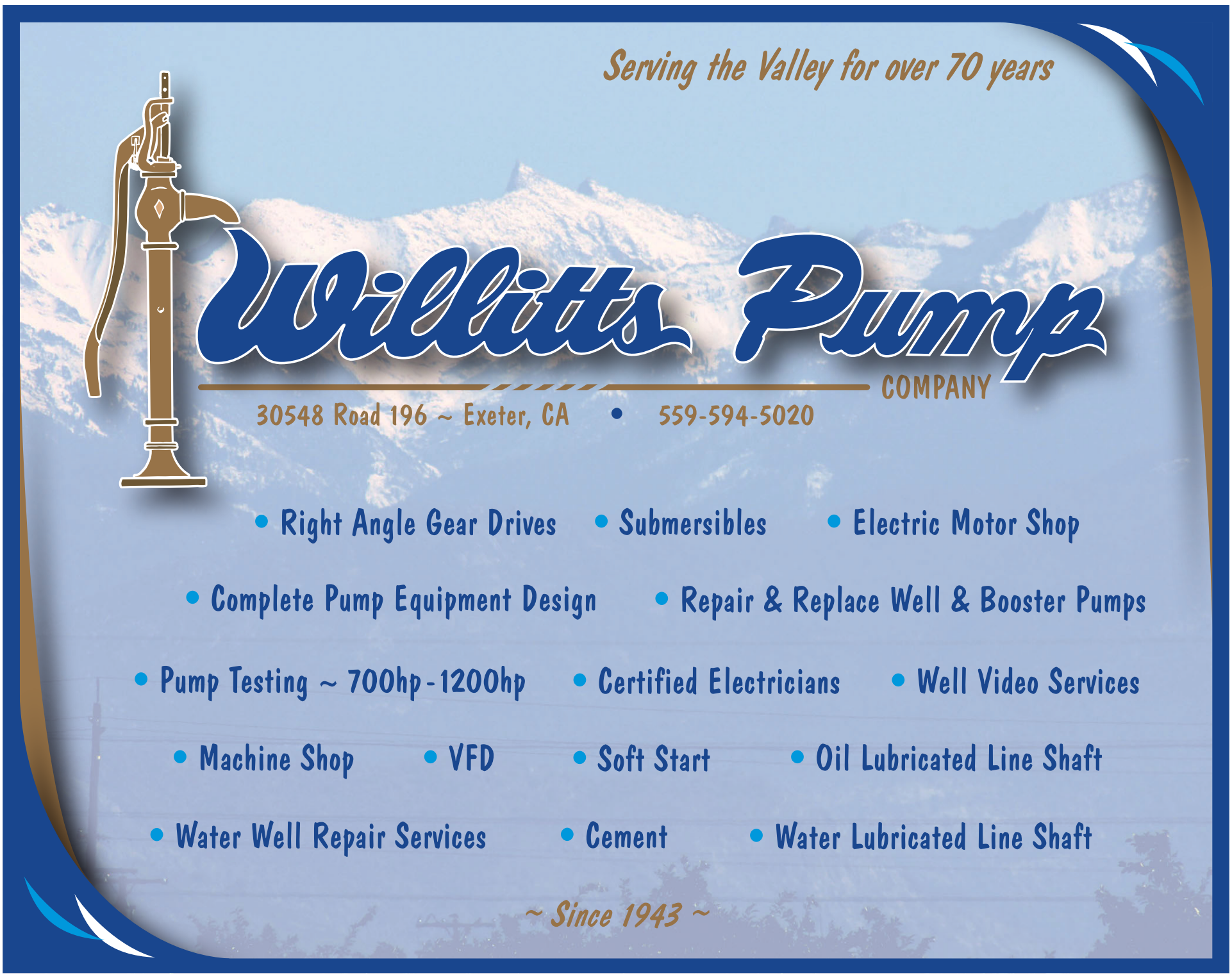
The memorial building will be transformed to the Hot Spot in Town, a 1920 Speakeasy highlighting everything vintage. Guests will be greeted by a series of vintage cars, and will enter into an exquisitely decorated venue complete with Skyline Searchlights, exterior and interior up lighting, a full orchestra, ballroom dancing, vocal performances, champagne cocktails, and to top it all off, guests will participate in a "who done it" Murder Mystery. Two of Tulare's elite will join twenty cast members of the county. Sheriff Mike Boudreaux, and District Attorney, Timothy Ward, as well as countless others will provide clues to help identify the murderer of the evening. Bribery money will be given with each VIP Ticket, "A Little Dance Never Killed Nobody….. or did it?"

Master of Ceremonies will take the guests back in time to the prohibition and will keep everyone guessing as they move around the venue collecting hints and gather clues to help solve the mystery. Of course, our very own Jay Gatsby will narrate the evening's event, and will provide his own sarcastic unabashed clues throughout the night.

An Evening with the Great Gatsby Gala is sure to be the most fashionable and eagerly anticipated fundraising events in Tulare County of 2016. Never before has a murder mystery been performed where 520 guests solve the mystery.

Each Upper Level VIP Benefactor will enjoy a private VIP cocktail reception hosted by the Murder Mystery Cast. At 6:00 pm, the general guests will also have a cocktail hour in when they will meet the cast as well. At 7:00 guests will enjoy a delicious dinner prepared by the executive chef, followed by a scrumptious dessert which will "trigger" the murder. Throughout the evening live music, ballroom dance and vocal performances will entertain at the Speakeasy. Guests are encouraged to dress in their best "Gatsby" attire, Tuxedos preferred.

As the evening progresses, the music will too. Music from Sinatra, Martin, Como, Michael Buble, Harry Connick, Jr. and Fergie will allow everyone an opportunity to party and dance like Gatsby.

All proceeds from the event will be used to support the purchases of much needed equipment for Tulare Regional Medical Center, as well as the new focus of the Foundation, to promote new community outreach activities and fundraisers. The mission of the Foundation is to secure philanthropic support for Tulare Regional Medical Center, supporting medical services and bringing healing comfort and high quality care to the people it serves. With your continued support we continue to keep our Mission at the forefront of our focus. Save the date — March 26, 2016! You won't want to miss this fun-filled and exciting event! It's the talk of the County. Limited seating and tickets. Ticket prices to the Great Gatsby Gala are $150.00 and are available now at the Foundation Office, or at the Gift Shop in Tulare Regional Medical Center. Give a ticket for Christmas!

For more information to become a Gala Benefactor or Underwriter, please visit our website at: www.tularehospitalfoundation.org or call 559-685-3438 for details. The Tulare Hospital Foundation is a 501(c)(3) Tax Exempt organization, has been formed to establish and maintain philanthropic support for the purchase of equipment used at Tulare Regional Medical Center, providing the highest quality care possible to the people it serves. Working with the City of Tulare, corporate and private benefactors, we are dedicated to making the dream of a State of the Art Medical Center in Tulare become a reality.